

# ATC

## Asian Trash Cinema

Volume One Number Five \$5.00  
slightly higher in Canada



**Available Now!**  
**Asian Trash Cinema:**  
**The Book**

**by Thomas Weisser**  
**with an introduction by Craig Ledbetter**



**The first book on contemporary Hong Kong Cinema!**  
**Over 700 reviews**  
**100+ photos [some in color]**  
**Plus an indispensable Director Filmography**  
**And a complete Genre listing**

**Available mail-order for**  
**\$19.95 plus \$2.90 shipping**  
**Send check or money order**  
**Payable to Asian Trash Cinema**  
**to ATC ♦ PO Box 5367 ♦ Kingwood TX 77325**

**How can you live without it?**

# Asian Trash Cinema

Co-Editors: Craig Ledbetter and Tom Weisser ★ Design/Artwork: Frankie Dahl

## Editorial

from CRAIG LEDBETTER

By the time you're reading this, Tom and I will be in Japan checking out as much obscure Japanese Horror and sleaze as we can find. A full report will appear next time. Meanwhile, take a look at this issue's mix of sleaze and horror. I'm ecstatic to have a cover by Marvel Comics' artist extraordinaire, Ron Lim. His interpretation of the New Wave Japanese vampire flick, *MY SOUL IS SLASHED* is a winner. I've given Chris D.'s Yakuza long-running article a rest for this issue, but it will return next time; in its place we're running the first of Bob Sargent's two-part groundbreaking article on *The Son Of The Black Mass* samurai series. Lee Server (of *Film Comment*) and August Ragone (of *Markalite* and in the future, *Henshin*) appear for their first, but hopefully not last time. August, usually known for his *Godzilla* expertise, not only contributes a review of the big guy's newest, but also really gets into what the *Spirit of ATC* is all about with his review of *THE VIOLENT CLASSROOM*.

A special THANK YOU goes to *Film Threat* Editor, Dave Williams. By allowing me to contribute an article on Asian films to that stellar magazine, ATC has expanded by leaps and bounds these past few months.

Finally, if you're a fan of American Martial Arts films, I highly recommend *NINJA DRAGON FURY*. It's a 20 page digest sized zine with good photo reproduction and well written reviews. Issue #4 covers *FEARLESS TIGER*, *SHOWDOWN*, *RAGE AND HONOR*, *BLOOD WARRIORS*, *STREET KNIGHT*, *HARD TARGET* and much more. \$3.00 per issue or \$10 for 4. Send off to William Wiggins, 332 Ocean Avenue, Ocean City, NJ 08226. Tell em I sent you.

And for those of you who've been wondering what John Woo's been up to lately (rumors are abundant since his fiasco with Universal over the unfortunate butchering of *HARD TARGET*): apparently he's been hired to direct 20th Century Fox's *TEARS OF THE SUN* scheduled to begin production this fall in South America. The studio describes it as: "a story of four Americans whose trip to the Amazon becomes an adventure in survival against cannibals and the environment." Can this be true? Is John Woo doing *Cannibal Holocaust* 2?

I must've died and gone to heaven!

**EDITORIAL**

by Craig Ledbetter Page 3

**LETTERS**

with comments by Tom Weisser Page 5

*Reviews:*

**FIRST SHOT**

by Max Allan Collins Page 11

**HEROIC TRIO 2**

by Louis Paul Page 12

**HONG KONG GODFATHER**

by Steve Fentone Page 12

**VIOLENT CLASSROOM**

by August Ragone Page 13

**NAKED KILLER #1 & #2**

by Lee Server Page 15

**FIVE ELEMENT NINJA**

by David Chute Page 17

**VENDETTA**

by Brian Quinn Page 17

**THAT'S MONEY**

by Steve Fentone Page 18

**RIGHTING WRONGS**

by Jeff Segal Page 19

**SUPER COP 2: PROJECT S**

by William Wilson Page 20

*Articles*

**RETURN OF ITTO OGAMI**

by Max Allan Collins Page 22

**1+2= PARADISE**

by Jim McLennan Page 26

**CAPTURED FOR SEX**

by Travis Crawford Page 28

**GODZILLA VS MECHAGODZILLA**

by August Ragone Page 31

**TSUI HARK'S WORLD OF FANTASY**

by Dr. Craig D. Reid Page 34

**HONG KONG GENDER BENDERS**

by Jayne Caeneddi Page 37

**MY SOUL IS SLASHED**

by Charles R P Bucklin Page 38

**DEATH WEARS A TOPNOT**

by Bob Sargent Page 40

*Cover Art: an original drawing by Marvel Comic wizard Ron Lim depicting the climatic scene from My Soul is Slashed*

*Ron is currently working on the X-Men 2099 monthly, the Spidermen Unlimited quarterly, and the Venom mini series*  
*Back cover: Yumi Iori from Shogun's Heron*





with commentary by co-editor Tom Weisser

# LETTERS

Dear Tom and Craig,

The name of this magazine is Asian Trash Cinema; it isn't Asian Trash OVAs (VIDEO GIRL AI); it isn't Asian Trash TV Shows (SAILOR MOON). It's supposed to be about movies. UROTUKI DOJI (not UROTOTSUKI!!!) has been playing in theaters around the country; that's a movie. SAILOR MOON is a TV series, not a movie. VIDEO GIRL AI is an Original Anime Video series, not a movie.

If some readers of Asian Trash Cinema want to read about Anime TV series and OAVs, tell them to read MangaZine from Antarctic Press in San Antonio, Animerica from Viz Press in San Francisco, V-Max (from the San Jose, CA area), Protoculture Addicts from Janus Publications in Quebec, or Anime UK Magazine from London. These publications can be found at Tower Books and at comicbook stores around the country.

For Japanese, Chinese and other Asian cinema news and reviews, I read ATC, CineRaider, Oriental Cinema, MAMA, and coming soon (from Antarctic Press) *Sentai*, and possibly *Markalite*, if the next issue ever appears.

I'm not going to complain (not much anyway) about the nekkid live women (un)covered in ATC, considering the majority of the readership here. But nekkid anime girls?? (And I do mean girls. Ai looks about 15.) I've already read half a dozen articles elsewhere on VIDEO GIRL AI in the past few months, and if your readers want to see pictures of a naked Ai, they can look up the October '93 issue of *MangaZine* from Antarctic Press. Plus, there's a live action AI movie, covered in the latest Protoculture Addicts issue. Anyway, that's my reaction to finding AI and SAILOR MOON in ATC.

Thank you for publishing the letter from Gene LaDus. Finally, a sane voice in the wilderness! She wrote an entertaining review of LOVE OF MANY SWORDS for CineRaider #1. It isn't every movie review where I can find a good comment on the hero's rear!

With a title like Asian Trash Cinema, why are Professors and semi-literate puritans reading this

magazine? Can't they tell from the title what the contents would be? How did the semi-literate [Clyde Bergman?] know what you said about him in the last issue? Surely, after the previous issue, he'd be so disgusted that he'd never pick up another!

Mostly I read, and enjoy, ATC for its coverage of Asian films, like CRIME STORY, FONG SAI-YUK, FULL CONTACT, KILLER SNAKES. I also enjoyed the articles on Sammo Yung, Lone Wolf and Child, yakuza filmography, John Woo interviews. But please, no more OAV anime girls!!!!

—Laurine White

ATC editors—

I gobbled up your latest issue of ATC in one sitting. Another fine, solid job. Some comments on the often informative, usually hysterically funny Letters Page(s). Boy! It's great when some of these assholes write back after being insulted by you. They're usually so funny, they get practically incoherent and that make me laugh twice as hard. Your commentary is very entertaining, to say the least.

In a SIGHT AND SOUND issue some months ago, they asked some famous critics and filmmakers about their ten favorite films. John Woo listed Jean-Pierre Melville's *LE SAMOURAI* as one of his all time favorites. Critics have pretty much admitted the influence of Melville on Woo (narratively, and codes-of-honor concepts, but not necessarily visually nor editing-wise), but since many critics and film-writers haven't ever seen "LE SAMOURAI" they are actually in the dark about just how much Woo took from that film for "THE KILLER".

Woo even admitted in an interview that Alain Delon (in Melville's gangster flicks) taught him all he knew about how to act cool and hold a gun. *LE SAMOURAI* also opens with a Thed assassin killing a nightclub owner and then he becomes fascinated by a singer who witnessed the carnage. By the way he moves and acts, Chow Yun-Fat even evokes Delon's cool persona. Hell,

Chow even wears the famous "white gloves" which Delon wore in *LE SAMOURAI*. From my point of view, any description of Chow's acting which leaves out Delon is just plain uninformed. And, incidentally, Delon's name is also "Jeff" in Melville's film...

By the way, Chris D's piece on Yakuza films was well done, but as with the other parts of this multi-segmented article, it just didn't grab me as I thought it would. Bizarrely enough, I am usually more interested in Japanese stuff than HK. He did a good job, but I just didn't get as wrapped up in it as I did with some of the other articles.

--Richard Menello

Dear Mr Ledbetter and Mr Weissner:

I'm generally pleased with ATC #5, particularly with the third installment of Yakuza reviews. I do have one problem, however--the "letters" column. Just because some half-wit with an empty opinion writes a letter, that doesn't mean it's worthy of publication.

I am thinking specifically of the embarrassingly incoherent ramblings of Clyde Bergman and the backwards Christian moralizing of Professor Edwin Ernst if you have some personal gripe with Mr Bergman, or vice versa, it is unnecessary--and unappreciated--to turn ATC into a public forum for adolescent name calling. Frankly, I don't care about Mr Bergman and I don't want to pay money to be subjected to his idiocy.

As for "Dr" Ernst, I can understand your wanting to offer dissenting viewpoints to add to a constructive debate, but at least make sure they're intelligent views, a goal apparently too lofty for Ernst. I feel downright sorry for him--equating one's personal morality with serious, intelligent criticism is hopelessly naive and hardly echoes of the sophistication with which he intends to associate himself. He sounds more like Jesse Helms than a highbrow asshole.

In short, please stop publishing these sort of letters. They add nothing to your magazine. In fact, they actually ruin it--destroying the spirit of enthusiasm and healthy scholarship that your magazine should be dedicated to.

--Andrew Grossman

Dear sirs:

I am writing to you because I am concerned over the influence you have on many of our young people. It is not necessary for you to use the "F" word so freely. Kindly, in the future, be more discreet. Consider your responsibilities to

our society. I am not suggesting that you censor ideas in your articles. Simply, print inappropriate words with asterisks: for example F\*\*K. Please begin this practice with your next issue.

--John Griswold, P.U.R.E.

(Parents Urging Responsible Entertainment)

P.U.R.E? Don't you have anything better to do with your time? You and your "association" of Word-Police can knock on some other fu\*k'ing door.

ATC--

I honestly have to say that your zine keeps getting better and better. You'll have a very difficult time topping issue #5. I thoroughly enjoyed the mixture of Japanese and Hong Kong coverage and the well researched articles and reviews. The John Woo interviews were quite illuminating despite the fact that the guy has been interviewed to death lately.

Although I'm not a great fan of Japanese, Jim McLennan's informative review of *VIDEO GIRL AI* has made me want to see it.

I don't care what some people say about the length of the letters section, I think it's great fun to read comments from other readers and hope you'll continue to keep the section like it is. However, I must comment on "Professor" Ernst's letter. Do people actually read this magazine without looking at the title? While the word "trash" is not meant to denigrate these movies in any way, it does serve as a suitable description for films that are generally looked down upon by highbrow society (i.e. snobs). There are enough American critics to champion the works of a Kurosawa or Itami that you need not bore more people with endless critical raves for their oft-overpraised projects. The point of ATC and similar magazines is to spotlight movies ignored by the mainstream (and sometimes underground) press which may appeal to readers turned off by the all too stagnant creativity of mainstream cinema. That these "trash" flicks may at times dwell on "man's dark inhumanity" is probably one reason why the mainstream press chooses to conveniently bypass them in favor of socially acceptable (and boring) films.

--Richard Akiyama

Craig--

When my friend told me that you recently wrote an article about Hong Kong films for *Film Threat*, I was shocked. In fact, I told him that he was "out of his mind." I figured there's no way

Craig Ledbetter would have written for that magazine! But sure enough, it was true! Why would you do something like that? *Film Threat* is nothing but a low-rent Fangoria....We want to keep Hong Kong films in our own cult world...not share them with the amateur gore-hounds who dribble over *Film Threat*!

--Rick Vargas

*You are a pathetic soul. Pseudo-cool and so godawful/misguided. We don't want to keep Hong Kong films in our own "cult" world. Actually our goal is to let as many people know about Asian movies as possible (How does that grab you?).*

*Besides-- Film Threat is a viable, articulate, well-researched magazine dedicated to many different aspects of counter-culture cinema. Plus, I think Craig's article was a very good overview of HK films. I hope it was the first of many more to come.*

Hey boys--

In ATC#5 you commented 'we skew to a male audience-- and that audience is more interested in seeing exploitive pics of starlets than stars.' Well-- think again, cherry. Not all of your readers are breeders. Some of us prefer men and we'd rather see cheese-cake photos of Danny Lee or Jackie Chan (privately, they both swing to a different drummer anyway). Hell, you can even give us a naked Chow Yun-Fat-- there's nothing wrong with wishful thinking.

--Scott Williams



Jackie Chan

ATC.

For over a year now, there's been letters and heated discussion over your association with Video Search of Miami. I've personally come to the conclusion that I don't give a rat's ass who the publisher of ATC and ETC is-- as long as the editor(s) know the difference between "reporting" and "type."

But now I'm wondering-- what's the relationship between you and Something Weird Video? Is Mike Vraney also a partner in your organization? After reading John Charles' review of *KILLER SNAKES* in ATC#5, I admit to being very confused.

Not only was the review an embarrassing homage to Mike Vraney (referring to him as a "savior" and, worst, a "guru"), but it was also misleading and inaccurate. Although Charles insists that Something Weird has "unearthed" a "splice free" uncut version of this X-Rated exploitation flick, the truth is another story indeed. In reality, Vraney's *KILLER SNAKES* is the edited R-rated version, missing most of the nudity, a large portion of whipping and torture, plus an entire vicious rape scene.

The point I'm making has nothing to do with the lurid content of *KILLER SNAKES*-- rather, I question why ATC spent so much print-space "canonizing" Mike Vraney.

--Bob Kasins

*When I read between the lines of your letter, I see delusions of paranoia. Calm down. Nobody's trying to pull a fast one on you.*

*Personally, I respect Mike Vraney for his ability to run a successful mail-order company. He's one of a handful I could recommend without any reservation. But neither he-- nor Something Weird Video-- has anything to do with the ATC/ETC family.*

Tom and Craig--

Perhaps ATC is the wrong place to address this question, but here goes: recently I received a new catalogue from Video Search of Miami and I noticed the absence of certain Hong Kong films from the listing. When I contacted VSoM for an explanation (I thought, perhaps, it was an unfortunate oversight), I was told that a company called Century Video had secured American distribution rights for those films.

I have nothing against Video Search, but I must admit it makes me happy to finally see these films being released domestically through normal channels. The idea of being able to visit

my local video store and rent a copy of *A Better Tomorrow* (for example) or a Jackie Chan film is almost a dream come true.

Yet, after contacting the video stores in my area, I remain confused. The people at my favorite video hang-out told me they know nothing about new Hong Kong releases and, even more perplexing, they can find no record of a company called Century Video.

So, can you tell me exactly what's going on?  
--Robert C Davis

Your letter demands a two-part answer:

(1) The purpose of *Video Search* is to provide otherwise unavailable films to the video collector. *VSoM* immediately stops offering a title if it should become available domestically. In keeping with that policy, when "Century Video" contacted them regarding domestic distribution of certain HK video titles (specifically many of the John Woo film and most of the Jackie Chan movies), *VSoM* deleted them from the current catalog.

(2) "Century Home Entertainment" is a branch of Tai Seng (formerly Pan-Asia, aka Rainbow). Their original plan was to distribute many Hong Kong films to the American vid-stores under the "Century" moniker, but due to unfortunate complications over international distribution and copyright ownership, their concentration remains predominately in the "Chinatown marketplace."

As a result, even though mass "Anglo" distribution is not currently a reality in the USA, reputable "collector" companies like *VSoM* no longer sell these titles. We suggest you contact Tai Seng directly at (800) 888-3838, or write to them for a current catalog: Tai Seng Video, 170 South Spruce Ave #200, South San Francisco, CA 94080

Graig and Tom:

I picked up ATC at Dark Carnival in Berkeley. I found the letters section in the current issue interesting. First off, who is this Clyde Bergman? What a loser! At the other end of the spectrum, where does this Professor Edwin Ernst come off? Get a life, Edwin! Don't we have enough self-important "film authorities" masturbating in publications like *SIGHT & SOUND* and *FILM COMMENT*? These are the morons who call *THE KILLER* a comedy! They are the kind of people who look down upon Hong Kong Cinema.

If ATC treated films like Siskel & Ebert do, I wouldn't read it. To paraphrase a campaign slogan: "THEY'RE MOVIES. STUPID!" There's no point in watching if you want them to match the

self-indulgent styles of European filmmakers--slow pacing and dull acting. (Ron, what European films have you been watching? Ed.)

You watch Hong Kong Cinema (or at least I do) to enjoy the outrageousness, the style, the performers, etc. Maybe I am the only one who noticed, but American films have gone downhill in the past couple of years. When you look at a marquee and one film is called *THE SEAWAY* and the other *THE CHASE*, you have to ask yourself what degree of imagination went into those productions. I bet I could tell you the storylines of these films before the first frame rolls.

I have to agree with Gere LaDue that ATC could put a little more emphasis on the performances and not just the physical charms of the actresses. To Diana Bowman, you are absolutely correct about Quentin Tarantino "stealing" *CITY ON FIRE* for his *RESERVOIR DOGS*, but it goes both ways. I recently saw *FIRST SHOT*, a "historical" telling of the formation of the Independent Commission Against Corruption (ICAC) starring Ti Lung and Maggie Cheung. This film utilizes ("Steals" or "Borrows", choose your own term) *THE UNTOUCHABLES*. Instead of a small girl finding a bomb in a briefcase, it's a boy. Instead of the "Al Capone" figure (Waise Lee) clubbing a guest to death at a banquet, he pulls his finger off with a nutcracker. An agent escorting a witness through a courthouse is shot by the "Nitti" character dressed as a cop (He even shoots the agent in the head) and Ti immediately confronts Waise at a public ceremony, threatening to bring him down. And that's just the tip of the iceberg.  
--Ron Munillo

Contributor Max Allen Collins discusses the similarities between *FIRST SHOT* and *THE UNTOUCHABLES* in this very issue of ATC. Check it out.

In our humble opinion, with all due respect, Kevin Costner doesn't deserve to hold Ti Lung's lock-strap.

Dear ATC--

Thanks a lot for both the ATC Book and ATC #3. While some people may knock the amount of space devoted to letters, I think it's part and parcel of a good magazine. I think the new balance between Chinese and Japanese films makes ATC a better publication. To have John Woo interviews (both of which provided new insights) sharing space with Yakuza films, *Godzilla*, *Samo Hung* (nice to see a piece on this



underappreciated talent), the Baby Cart films, made this issue probably the best one yet  
--Jason Gray

Thanks for the kind words regarding the previous issue (although my personal favorite is still #4). And good luck with your own magazine, Sub-Terranea. We're looking forward to the next issue featuring articles on the Euro-faves Ivan Rassimov and Maria Angela Giordano. Our readers can contact Jason at 47 Thorncliffe Pk #609, Toronto, Ontario M4H-1J5 Canada.

Dear Tom--

I love ATC. It's a class act.

Okay, let me cut to the chase I've seen Sukeben Deka, and I'm a BIG fan of Yoko Minamino. Don't think I'm just a lecherous old fart, but has she ever performed in the nude? I'm sure this is highly unlikely, but I NEED to know. The girl makes me hot!

--George Patino

As unlikely as it may seem--Yes! Yoko Minamino does a topless rape scene in the Japanese turn-of-the-century drama *Kan Tsubaki* (1990). However, I still think you're a lecherous old fart.



Yoko Minamino (*Sukeben Deka*)

Tom and Craig--

ATC #3 was another excellent issue, except for the VIDEO GIRL AI article I didn't care one bit for the review. It's not Jim McLennan's writing but rather the subject matter. I'd rather only read the occasional animation review if it were the usual trashy, exploitation stuff. The highlight of the issue was the (2) John Woo interviews I'm always interested in what he has to say.

By the way, I loved ATC: The Book and found it to be worth every penny I spent on it. How about an update every month or so? [Holy shit! Is this your idea of a joke? Every month or so?] I was surprised to find reviews of films that my local Chinese video store didn't even have yet. The book comes in very handy when trying to decide on a film to watch.

--Andrew Kenny

Dear Tom--

A few comments on the delightful ATC: The Book. It enlivened a chilly weekend and is an invaluable reference for anyone who enjoys HK movies.

\*The "clever script" behind RUN, DON'T WALK is essentially the same script Francis Veber wrote for his own LES FUGITIFS then reused for the inevitable Disney remake, THREE FUGITIVES (1989), with Nick Nolte and Martin Short. Apparently, RUN, DON'T WALK is a remake of a remake, released in Hong Kong around the same time as the [underwhelming] American version.

\*Speaking of remakes, I'm glad RESERVOIR DOGS finally got nailed as a direct steal from Hong Kong's CITY ON FIRE - but what the hell, the story worked fine two times.

\*Yes, there is a LEE ROCK 2, and I think also a 3. Minus English subtitles (to the consternation of this viewer) Part 2 flew into HK theaters a mere three weeks after the first film enjoyed healthy profits. The films are (very loosely) based on the true story of a corrupt HK cop who absconded to Taiwan, allegedly with millions of ill-gotten dollars, in the 1970s.

\*TRIAD8: THE UNTOLD STORY premiered in HK in the summer of 1989. Its "pro-triad" sympathies earned it a Category III rating. I remember this film fondly because of a goofy subtitle boner. When Chow Yun-Fat leans over a hospitalized friend, he whispers in the friend's ear, "Who are you?" - not exactly the same question as "How are you?"

\*Stephen Chow "a GO model?" Perhaps, "Goofball's Quarterly." My Chinese girl friends

think he's goofy-looking, too. But he can be funny: methinks you're too hard on the first **FIGHT BACK TO SCHOOL**, particularly.

\*In the underrated department - the amazing **PROJECT A** films. Overrated - the tedious **ARMOUR OF GOD** films, despite their amazing stunt sequences.

\*Also better than its rating would suggest - Kirk Wong's **GUNMEN**. And the first **SAVIOR OF THE SOUL**. But the sequel, I think, is much worse than your generous (\*) rating suggests.

\*At least - someone brave enough to point out **HARD-BOILED**'s gaping plot holes! The Criterion disc makes a strong case for **THE KILLER** as John Woo's masterpiece thus far-- although, for my money, there is no film quite like **BULLET IN THE HEAD**.

\*Or, I guess, like **LEWD UZARD** - I don't believe it. Incredible...

\*The photos are uniformly excellent. How nice to attach names to often-fleeting faces. And where else will we see pictures of directors and Chow Yun-Fat's wife?

In closing let me reiterate on what a terrific book this is! I look forward to future updates - and, of course, new issues of ATC and ETC.

--Bob Cashill

*Thanks for the interesting list of comments on ATC: The Book. The project has proven to be very successful, it's already in a second pressing [Thanks, everybody!]. Response from other readers is encouraged.*

Craig and Tom--

I am waiting for someone to go to Japan so they can pick up **The Last Frankenstein** and **Evil Dead Trap 2** for me. The ATC reviews set my imagination on fire. I wish I could order them from Video Search of Miami, but I don't think the tapes would get through the Singapore customs.

--Lim Cheng Tju (Singapore)

*Despite all the complaints we might level against the sorry state of cinema in our country, letters like this one make us very happy to live in the United States.*

Editors--

Bob Cashill's letter in the recent ATC was worth a few chuckles. Let's deepen the controversy with more HK performer gossip. I want names! Who are the "she-males" and "sex-changes"?

Chow Yun-Fat is supposed to be happily married. Regardless of Cashill's report, I've never

heard anything about extra-marital affairs, trysts, or shit eating. What's going on here?

And it was good to see a letter from August Ragone. I wrote for a copy of his magazine **Markalite** but received no response and suspected it was discontinued.

--Jeff Segal

*The letter we printed in ATC#5 from August Ragone [coupled with our comments] solicited the following response from him:*

Hey! Wait a minute, man-- you make it seem as though I was blasting ATC out of the sky without mercy. I was just giving you honest creative/constructive criticism. Besides, my letter was in response to ATC#3 not #4-- I think.

I never made an "off-handed dismissal of Chris D's groundbreaking Yakuza installments;" All I said was that it had flaws with translations, which is true. Period. Otherwise, it's fucking (sorry P.U.R.E., we meant to print fu\*k'ing, Ed.) brilliant and I glad it's covered by someone who loves it like Chris.

Now, let me address #5, I read it in one night (after hanging out in a local vampire club-- gothic chicks in thigh-high boots, yeah!) and it's the best issue yet!

Your highly informative review of **LAST FRANKENSTEIN** was excellent; very insightful. Sarno Hung. Very good. Enjoyable and informative. In other words-- I liked it.

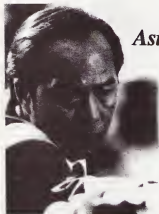
**SWORD OF VENGEANCE** (Baby Cart) PT 2 was excellent. Let me add: there was a three hour TV movie in the early '80s and that film spawned the TV series. But it didn't kill it-- Zatoichi did. Wakayama's brother Shitaro "Zatoichi" Katsu was one of the producers of the **VENGEANCE** series, and when Katsu insisted on reducing the stunts to keep the budget down, Wakayama flipped (not literally) and they both argued over the matter so passionately, that Katsu cancelled the series...

Strange, but true.

Can't wait for #6. What do you want me to write?

--August Ragone

As a matter of fact, August brings his unique writing talents to this very issue of ATC with an incredible observation of the newest **Godzilla** film and a review of **Violent Classroom**. His own magazine, now called **Henshin**, should be available soon. Write to him at P.O. Box 6846, Oakland CA 94603 for ordering information.

Ti Lung (*First Shot*)

## Asian Trash Cinema

# REVIEWS



### FIRST SHOT (1993)

DIRECTED BY DAVID LAM

REVIEW BY MAX ALLAN COLLINS

While *FIRST SHOT* has been enthusiastically received by most fans of Hong Kong crime movies - even garnering four stars (\*\*\*\*) in *ASIAN TRASH CINEMA: THE BOOK* the most interesting aspect of this gritty, effective film has been ignored: it's a remake of *THE UNTOUCHABLES*.

And a damn good one. In fact, as the author of four novels about Eliot Ness (and Ness appears as a secondary character in most of my Nate Heller novels, as well), I've already gone on record as disliking Brian DePalma's 1983 movie. Though I consider DePalma one of the best American film directors, the script he nearly transcended - courtesy of that ridiculously over-rated Pulitzer Prize-winning pomposity, David Mamet - was not just poorly researched, but idiotic. Canadian bounties are seen chasing bad guys sneaking booze over the border (booze was legal in Canada, that's why gangsters went there to buy it!); a mob-besieged Sean Connery makes sure his house is secure from bad guys, even as the camera tracks him through open windows; a judge changes juries in the middle of a trial

(huh?). Most offensively, Kevin Costner's painfully bland Eliot Ness suddenly becomes a vigilante, murdering Frank Nitti (about ten years before Nitti's actual death, officially a suicide).

So what a surprise - and delight - to see director David Lam transpose this subject matter to Hong Kong, and make a movie that captures the true spirit of Eliot Ness' war on Al Capone (and, even more, the spirit of the terrific *Dasulu* TV series with Robert Stack), leaving the movie it's imitating (almost plagiarizing) in the dust.

Police corruption - in fact, civil service corruption in general - substitutes for prohibition and bootlegging, while Hong Kong in the 1970s fills in for Chicago of the late '20s; the period feel is good, although one anachronistic AIDS joke slips in, during a largely unfortunate sequence in a gay bar.

Ti Lung - the somewhat forgotten star of *A BETTER TOMORROW* - has all the passion that Costner lacked. David Lam paints a Hong Kong so corrupt Chicago of the '30s seems benign. When Ti Lung and his handpicked misfits buck the mob, they are bucking the corrupt system as well, with every cop in town their enemy.

Waise Lee makes a far more convincing Capone (here, called Faucet, apparently because all the "dirty money" flows from him) than Robert

DeNiro in his hammy UNTOUCHABLES turn. Instead of wielding a baseball bat at a banquet "honoring" his co-workers, Waise at a similar banquet uses a nutcracker to pry off a disloyal crony's thumb. The confrontation between Lee and Lung, after the murder of one of his men, has the fire and power the DeNiro/Conner confrontation lacked. And Lung's paraphrase of Sean Connery's famous speech about breaking the rules to deal with bad guys has a passion Connery's Academy Award-winning performance doesn't match.

Ti Lung is aided and abetted by an exceptionally strong supporting cast - including a boyishly charming Simon Yam (quite a contrast to his Dr Lamb) as a formerly corrupt cop turned good guy, and an exquisitely lovely Maggie Cheung as an idealistic prosecutor working with the "untouchables." And, of course, the action scenes are startling in their brutality and bloodshed (somebody send a cassette of this to Janet Reno, quick).

But credit director Lam for interspersing the usual balls-to-the-wall Hong Kong bloodbath with thoughtful characterization and an equally thoughtful examination of morality in an increasingly amoral world. Heroes like Eliot Ness - and Ti Lung - are few and far between, these days.

## HEROIC TRIO 2: EXECUTIONERS (1993)

DIRECTED BY JOHNNY TO and  
CHING SIU TUNG

REVIEW BY LOUIS PAUL

A pre-credits prologue informs the audience that since the events that took place in Heroic Trio, a spectacular calamity has struck the earth and nuclear war has broken out and that most of the earth has been destroyed or lays in chaos.

The pre-credits sequence also informs us that a super-human being (mutated by exposure to radioactivity) has secretly built a conglomerate company that charges high prices for bootleg water that has not been tainted by radioactivity.

Executioners picks up, after the prologue, with Chet (Maggie Cheung) driving a semi full of un-radioactive water into a section of the city. It seems that nearly all of the available water has been poisoned by the nuclear war and bands of roving thugs attack these trucks and steal the water in order to re-sell it on the black market.

Wonder Woman (Anita Mui) has retired from crime-fighting to raise her daughter in a chaotic world and San (Michelle Yee) seeks work as a bodyguard for Hira (accompanied by a hunchbacked, hooded assistant, listed as being played by Anthony Wong in the films on screen English language credits).

The Mutant Super powerful Evil being introduced in the prologue has a strange relationship with a protégé, a soft voiced, Christ-like figure that unwittingly drives a rift between the seemingly thousands of thirsty, people living in the city and the government.

Wonder Woman's husband (now appointed to Police Commissioner) strives to bridge the gap between understanding the strange, handsome Christ-like figure (who is continually bathed in extreme white light during every one of his appearances) and enforcing the rule of the President and the Colonel.

The Colonel character is one who is truly in league with the superhuman evil being and with him, seeks to displace the power of the president and take over the government with the Colonel being the hand-picked ruler. The story goes all over the place in this film that comes off as more a follow-up than a direct sequel to 'Heroic Trio'. Major characters that have been set up as permanent members of the series in part one are brutally killed off in this film.

It's as if the filmmakers had made a concentrated effort to make a completely different film with the cast of part one, all the while retaining the barest threads of continuity to the ideas and characterization of the first film. Equal parts Mad Max (not to mention some influence dragged in from those Italian futuristic Road Warrior rip-offs), ferocious comic book violence (think Frank Miller of The Dark Knight and Hard-Boiled) and with enough surprising, graphic violence to delight fans of the HK genre.

## HONG KONG GODFATHER (1990)

REVIEW BY STEVE FENTONE

Following a police raid on a dope factory, undercover narc Sam Lam (the great Lo Lieh in a guest bit) gets taken out with a Triad icepick to the brain. The cops subsequently blame Mr. Koo, elderly godfather of the powerful Hung Ling Society, forcing him to flee Hong Kong. In his absence, Koo's son Mark is appointed as new leader, but his position is jeopardized by the

unstable antics of his hot-tempered brother, Mike (Tommy Wong). After all, as a gangster stated eloquently in Ringo Lam's *FULL CONTACT*: "Business is like shitting...smoothness is important". Friction soon develops between the Hung Ling Society and another branch of the Triad network, the Hoi Lung Society, run by the devious Fred (Alan Tang) who by eliminating all opposition wishes to promote himself to wholesaler instead of merely a retailer in the lucrative local drug cartel.

His partner in crime is the disfigured Woody (who resembles an escapee from a Dick Tracy cartoon with his bulbous chin formed of equal parts scar tissue and discount plastic surgery). When Mark is murdered by Fred & Woody's men, his brother York (Andy Lau) is elected his successor in the Hung Ling empire, and all-out war threatens to erupt amongst the Triads.

Officer Leung Chun Bong (Roy Cheung) of CID's Anti Triad Section hopes to play on York's inherent decent streak and prevent a citywide bloodbath. But when Mark's murder must be avenged wholesale his Vietnamese killers are rubbed out during a frantic apartment-house shootout which threatens to escalate the gang war. Hitmen are stabbed with glass and blown up by propane tank. Baseball bat and machete wielding thugs attack rival gangsters. Two-fisted handgunning and abrupt slow-motion moments inevitably mimic John Woo. There follows tense armed stalemates between cops and crooks, as well as stabbings, shootings, a 2X4 versus freeze duel, plus the obligatory shootout in an underground parking garage punctuated by a gangster run over in crunchy closeup by a speeding getaway car.

Because the violence is more realist and restrained and contrasted by lengthy quiet stretches, it is that much more effective. When the never-ending vendetta reaches boiling point, treacherous Fred meets his Waterloo at the motherlucker of all battles (which rages for the better part of ten minutes). Slow-motion and real time co-mingle during this seething ocean of street violence, as do conflicting police and gangster loyalties. While Hung Ling members, Hoi Lung members and HK not police clash bloodily all about them, York and Fred face each other to the death.

*HONG KONG GODFATHER* contains not one shred of inappropriate humour. Scenes of brutality are often accompanied by soaring choral harmonies and hymn-like chanting. Extra poetry

is added by stylish but simple photography (eg. hundreds of white prayer sheets fluttering in the wind at a mountaintop funeral, a spent cigarette tumbling slo-mo to the ground while emitting a cascade of ash). As with Woo's work, brutality is offset in perfect balance by non-doying sentimentality. The film aptly ends on an ominous closeup of a flapping Mainland Chinese flag, illustrating how 'free enterprise' (ie. organized crime) in Hong Kong will soon be jeopardized by the Communist 'corporate merger' in 1997.

Somehow *HONG KONG GODFATHER* seems to have slipped through the cracks amidst all the (albeit deserved) recent hoopla surrounding Messrs. Woo and Lam. It's definitely a cut way above routine.

## **VIOLENT CLASSROOM (1976)** **DIRECTED BY AKIHISA OKAMOTO** **REVIEW BY AUGUST RAGONE**

Tei Motion Picture Company is known for dabbling in many genres. Superhero, Horror, Martial Arts and Yakuza films. But the one thing that Tei is NOT known for in the west, is pure and unadulterated Exploitation.

*THE VIOLENT CLASSROOM* is an excellent example of Japanese Exploitation. The western viewer need not understand the complexities of *Jingi* (the Gambler's Code), the subtleties of *Bushido* (the Samurai Edict)-or anything 'Japanese' at all, for that matter.

Completely understandable in any culture, *THE VIOLENT CLASSROOM* takes *THE BLACKBOARD JUNGLE*, *DARKLY MY SWEET*, *TO SIR WITH LOVE* and mixes it with a dasher of *THE GLORY TEMPLERS*, giving us one of the most purely outrageous films from Japanese film-dom's 'militarist period' of the 1970s-this film is pure undiluted enjoyable Trash, shot as an A-Picture! You won't believe your own eyes.

Yusaku Matsuda (best known to westerners as "Sato" from Ridley Scott's *BLACK RAIN*) stars as Katsuki Mizoguchi, a teacher brought into a prestigious high school to quell 'The Sidewinders', a teenage motorcycle gang, from ruining its reputation. Of course his character has an ambiguous past. Even after the malcontents are somewhat tempered, they blackmail one of the school's board of directors by taking sleazy photos of his glue-sniffing daughter in very compromising positions with a member of the gang.

Hiroshi, leader of The Sidewinders, digs up the dirt on teacher Mizoguchi, and tries to blackmail him into getting off their backs-failing miserably. Mizoguchi was a Heavy Weight boxer who killed a man in the ring.

Mizoguchi, burdened by the death, is not above using his skills on the gang. Still, the gang goes about upholding their honor, by getting even with anyone who dislikes them, including beating the hell out of a drunkard teacher for kicking over their bikes parked in a Red-Light district.

Hiroshi follows Mizoguchi's younger sister, Junko (Yukari Yamamoto), after leaving a porno theater and rapes her in the teacher's own home-adding fuel to the fire between he and Hiroshi, and a savage bout of fistcuffs the next day at school (one of the film's outstanding sequences). Somewhat of an sexual introvert, Hiroshi actually loves Junko, and didn't mean to hurt her-but she hates him just the same.

When test finals come in, The Sidewinders rip down all the results-causing a violent fight to break out between the school's Honor Guard and the teenage bikers. With the PTA demanding action, or funding will be pulled out, the Headmaster becomes fed up-Mizoguchi's methods aren't enough. The gang must be put to a stop by any means. That afternoon, Hiroshi tries to speak to Junko, but, is so ashamed that he cannot even look her in the face. She runs off in tears.

One night, a beautiful female teacher (Maria Yasushi), stumbles across handbills being printed in the school's offices, framing the gang for a number of deeds-she is caught by the leader of the Honor Guard, who reports the witness to the Headmaster. Yasushi goes to Mizoguchi and Junko with the story, but he is drunk and depressed, dismissing her. Junko insists on walking her home.

Along the way, they are attacked by The Sidewinders, wearing ski masks, who attempt to rape the both of them. Junko breaks away, and in the footchase, she is hit head-on by a truck. The next day, while out riding with the gang, Hiroshi is shocked to hear about Junko, who is fighting for her life in a hospital. Racing back into the city, Hiroshi desperately tries to see her. But upon Mizoguchi laying his eyes upon the malcontent, he is severely beaten by the former-boxer.

Defeated and bleeding, Hiroshi says that he had nothing to do with the previous night's incident and confesses that he loves her.

Mizoguchi tells him to get out. She soon expires, and the teacher is now on the edge of sanity.

Alienated from all corners, The Sidewinders attempt to get to the bottom of things by capturing a member of the Honor Guard. After several hours of torture, he confesses that it was they who were behind framing them... and caused Junko's fatal encounter. Hiroshi asks Mizoguchi to come to their hideout to talk. He listens, but doesn't care anymore-he leaves The Sidewinders to their own fate.

At the all-important ceremony in which the school will receive its donations and grants, a leather jacket-clad Mizoguchi appears with his resignation papers and evidence against the Headmaster, who was behind the whole scheme of turning The Sidewinders into scapegoats. In a burst of manic violence, the edgy teacher proceeds to beat the spit out of the worthless bastard. His ass is saved by the Honor Guard, who beat Mizoguchi with "bôken" (wooden sword).

Into the school ride The Sidewinders, to rescue the teach and exact revenge, throwing Molotov Cocktails and countering wooden swords with pipes. Needless to say, all Hell breaks loose with the school burning around them, a bare-handed Mizoguchi squares off against the katana-wielding Headmaster.

The last scene is brilliant. Bloodied but unbowed, Mizoguchi and Hiroshi bury the hatchet with a mutual smirk, and as they face the arriving police, the teacher takes a swig from a flask as the JD combs his hair, as the cops rush towards them: freeze-frame/the end! Man, was I grinning from ear to ear when I saw the both of them exuding machismo maximum! Perfect! Both of them probably ended up going to the same prison, and they should have gotten a sequel-what'a team!

Okamoto's direction (he also directed the 1991 Toei Video Cinema release, *LADY BATTLE COP* aka *ONNA BATORUKÔPU*) is gaunt, stylized and masterfully composed in ToeiScope. Tense editing highlighting the numerous action-oriented scenes. As an example, the opening title montage (shot in sepia-tone), is so cleverly conceived and achieves such a level of cool, it defies description-showcasing the 'happy-go-luck' exploits of The Sidewinders. You'll have to take my word for it readers... its mind-boggling.

Wakao Nakajima's slick photography is highlighted by subtle lighting and over-saturated color film stock, lending an atmosphere of the unreal to

the outrageous proceedings. Very smooth transition for Okamoto, who usually helms Toei's Yakuza potboilers.

The bikers were played by a real motorcycle club/band, "The Cruise", and one of their songs can be heard in the film. The famous and eclectic composer Shunsuke Kikuchi provides VIOLENT CLASSROOM with its dynamic electric-based score. No stranger to action, horror or fantasy, Kikuchi has previously scored THE GOLDEN BAT, TERROR BENEATH THE SEA, ATTACK OF THE MONSTERS, GAMERA VS. MONSTER X and many more (as well as setting the standard for superhero television scores in the '70s).

The late actor Matsuda also starred in a number of Charles Bronson-styled roles, playing either a psycho-killer or a cold-blooded hitman (the later spanning several films), before writing, directing and starring in his own sf-themed film A.HOMANS (Toei, 1987). Matsuda also starred as the Werewolfman in the 1974 Toho horror film, MARK OF THE WOLF (based on the manga WolfGuy, which Toei also made into a film starring Shinichi "Sonny" Chiba), in which he played a character similar to CLASSROOM's Hiroshi--although he was the protagonist. A very eccentric and intense actor, who sadly succumbed to cancer in 1989.

But one of his most outstanding roles is that of Katsuki Mizoguchi in VIOLENT CLASSROOM-- a quiet man (with a dark past) on the edge of unbridled violence--a film with all its glue-sniffing addicts, tough-guy posturing and sleazy undercurrents, he may be most fondly remembered.

See THE VIOLENT CLASSROOM any chance you get, you'll thank me for it. Special thanks to Patrick Macias for supplying me with the tape for review.

## **NAKED KILLER (1992) and NAKED KILLER 2 (1993) (RAPED BY AN ANGEL) REVIEW BY LEE SERVER**

Sordid and stylish, moving and ludicrous, THE NAKED KILLER is, for me, one of the touchstones in the whole exhilarating world of the nouveau-HK cinema. From the sultry, evocative and erotic credits (abstracted images of the film's three younger females, masked, nude, knife-wielding; the title credit bilingually projected on naked and writhing back and buttocks) to the explosive,

Wagnerian ending, with all its narrative surprises and kinetic outbursts in between, NAKED KILLER provides the sort of gleefully self-assured storytelling and imaginative visualization of which Hollywood no longer seems capable.

In the grand trash cinema tradition of ripping off the latest hit, KILLER was obviously constructed as a response to the inept but hugely successful "erotic thriller," BASIC INSTINCT. Here too we have commingled sex and violence, lesbians, a lethal leading lady, flawed hero, a passionate yet ambiguous love affair. However, in the prototype, the underliably lurid minds of Eszterhas and Verhoeven are continually reigned in by the constraints of naturalism imposed on all non-fantasy U.S. product (see John Woo's recent HARD TARGET troubles, getting his signature tropes past rigid American preview audiences), making BASIC INSTINCT no more than a hyped-up tv movie with a few public hairs thrown in.

THE NAKED KILLER, on the other hand, enjoys the near-total stylistic and narrative freedom allowed by the much more adventurous Hong Kong and Asian moviegoing public. The film's makers, Jing Wong (producer-writer) and Clarence Fok Yiu Leung (director), follow in the footsteps of such subversive, over-the-top authors as Sam Fuller and Seijun Suzuki, never allowing for one extravagant idea or image when three or four can be crammed into the same number of frames.

The film opens in an atmosphere of giallo-ish mystery, overdressed beauty seemingly being stalked on empty, glistening, blue-lit streets. But it turns out the beauty is the stalker after all, slipping into the thuggish victim's shower, naked except for her pistol. She wounds him, clobbers him with barbells, and then the calculated coup de grace--a bullet through the penis. Out to police investigators, including Simon Yam, traumatized witness to his brother's slaying some time before. Now Yam is impotent and loses his lunch at the first sign of violence.

At the crime scene he suspects a connection between a series of recent murders involving emasculations. At a hair salon he encounters Kitty (played by Yau Shuk Ching), gorgeous, impudent and violent-tempered, who is soon stabbing a chauvinistic hairdresser through the balls with a knife. Yam gives chase but when Kitty turns a gun on him, he begins puking. Despite this harrowing introduction, the two are strangely attracted and begin seeing each other socially

But circumstances, and Kitty's ultra-violent temper, quickly take the girl's life in an unexpected and bizarre direction. When her father is inadvertently killed by a sleazeball businessman, Kitty goes to his office for revenge, shooting up the place and blowing away a few dozen henchmen, nearly getting raped in the process. A would-be female hostage turns out to be her savior, utilizing an exploding hat and deadly holes in their blood-soaked escape from the building. The older woman is Sister Cindy, the world's leading female assassin and after surgically removing Kitty's fingerprints, tells her she has the right stuff to become a professional killer.

As the narrative proceeds by elliptical leaps and bounds, we get to know a rival hit team: horny and beautiful lesbians Baby and Princess, the latter a renegade student of Sister Cindy. Their next assignment, as it happens, is a revenge hit on the former teacher and her talented new associate.

Meanwhile, lovelorn Simon Yam spots a woman he takes to be the long-disappeared Kitty. She denies her identity to him but Yam obsessively pursues her. The lesbian killers make contact now, too. Princess jealously sizing up her opposite number only to become sexually infatuated with her. Kitty and Yam at last make love, while Princess has very rough sex (a machine gun plays a part) with Baby while fantasizing about her new lust object. Sister Cindy is killed and gang-raped after a violent storming of her house. Kitty avenges her: the lethal lesbians are sent to hell, and the heroine and her man come together for one last embrace. In an intensely romantic climax that is equal parts ROMEO & JULIET and WHITE HEAT, the star-crossed lovers decide they would rather die together than live apart and blow themselves into a million pieces.

With an exhausting energy and inventiveness, the film hurtles from one high point to another. The action scenes have the usual HK vigor and overkill, seeds of stuntmen going down in the big shootouts at the office building and the attack on Sister Cindy. The more intimate murder of the gangster in the swimming pool, with a nude Baby and Princess making love at the shallow end while the dead man's body floats a few feet away, is a tour de force of stylish decadence.

So too is the kinky cross-cutting sequence that contrasts Kitty and Simon's romantic passion with Princess's frustrated and sadistic screwing

of the pliant Baby. The film's flow of demented creativity never stops, with something to grab the viewer's attention in every scene.

Of the screenplay's wealth of enjoyable excesses, perhaps the most amusing is the idea of Sister Cindy's basement training ground, always stocked with a fresh supply of Hong Kong's most wanted rapists and maniacs. Simon Yam as the troubled cop performs with his usual quirky charisma, but NAKED KILLER belongs to its leading lady, glorious Chingmy Yau. Reminiscent of the young Jane Fonda, Chingmy makes a mesmerizing transformation from spirited, hot-tempered college girl type to the seductive, ice cold persona of her trained killer. All in all, THE NAKED KILLER performs like the best of Hong Kong's modern pop classics, at full throttle, with reckless imagination and total determination to give the audience much more than its money's worth.

The so-called sequel, NAKED KILLER 2, alternately and more accurately known as RAPED BY AN ANGEL, is a marketing ploy more than a sequel proper (logically, since not a single character survived the blood-soaked original), with only the male and female leads tying it to the previous title. Although RAPED has its share of sleazy sex, violence, and outrageous notions, it lacks THE NAKED KILLER's over-the-top originality and juicy stylization.

Like a more explicit version of one of those Lifetime cable woman-in-jeopardy flicks, RAPED



*Naked Killer 2: Raped By An Angel*



BY AN ANGEL tells of a pillar of the community who's secretly a vicious pervert and rapist in his spare time, now stalking cute-as-a-button college student Chingmy Yau and her adorable girlfriends. Chingmy seeks help from her new boyfriend, Triad boss Simon Yam, but the clever rapist turns the tables and gets Yam arrested.

In the end, the rapist very nearly gets his way with the heroine in the ultra-violent final showdown, but swallows a crossbow arrow instead and Chingmy and gangster Simon live happily ever after. The sex scenes are frequent and intense, including one startling upside-down masturbation session and a splattered video screen. But the creaky plot, the predictable historicism in the courtroom, the surprise twist at the end, all have a seen-it-before quality that makes the so-called sequel a pale followup to the extraordinary original.

*Reviewer Lee Server interviewed Gene Evans in the May-June issue of Film Comment and has two new books out, OVER MY DEAD BODY (Chronicle Books) and SAM FULLER: FILM IS A BATTLEGROUND (McFarland).*

## **FIVE ELEMENT NINJA aka SUPER NINJAS (1982) DIRECTED BY CHANG CHEH REVIEW BY DAVID CHUTE**

Wild, stylish, bloody stuff, the kung fu equivalent of a "Baby Carl" film. It's a colorful Shawscope picture with lush early-Chinese-restaurant decor and exteriors filmed on garishly phoney studio sets (perhaps the secret aesthetic link Between Shaw and Hammer). But the action is lavish, bloody and inventive, and its thrillingly staged, the filmmaking integrates all the potential shortcomings into a style.

The steady flow of ritualized sequences - and spouting blood - gets a compelling momentum going. The fun is in elaborations on a typical plot: A martial arts school is challenged by a band of nasty ninja, debilish Japs divided into five "elemental" Units - Gold, Wood, Water, Fire and Earth, each with a totem, color and appropriate killing method.

Hero Hsiao (Chien Tien Chi) learns some secret ninja tricks in order to defeat them, but not before his best pal (Lo Meng) is all-but disembowled by a Japanese Mata Hari (Chen Pei Ho). One great early shot has a fighter, speared from below by the dastardly Earth Ninjas, fighting manfully as a length of intestine dangles down to his ankles.

## **VENDETTA (1992)**

**DIRECTED BY LEUNG SIU HUNG  
REVIEW BY BRIAN QUINN**

After watching so many Hong Kong films in the last couple of years, I was starting to get a little burned out on the endless stream of gun-toting gangsters, flying swordsman, hopping vampires, and lovesick ghosts. A few weeks after watching many of these films I was finding it hard to differentiate between them. Luckily, every time my interest has started to wane, a film comes along that totally blows me away and reminds me why I started seeking out these films in the first place. VENDETTA is just such a film, a solidly directed work that will keep you glued to the screen and on the edge of your seat throughout its lean eighty-six minute running time.

Director Leung Siu Hung (INSANITY), working from a story by producer Raymond Wong, tells the tale of young Hong Kong police officer David Chan (Lui Leung Wai, aka Ray Lui, impressive star of TO BE NUMBER ONE), first seen bringing his wife Kitty (Veronica Yip) to the hospital as she goes into labor. He's soon called from her side to the scene of a robbery/hostage crisis, during which he kills two of the suspects, a brother and sister, and captures the third, their older brother Hung Long (Tommy Wong). Thoroughly traumatized by the events, he returns to the hospital, where he keeps thinking he sees the two slain suspects in the hallways and entering the delivery room. Then, his wife gives birth to twins, a boy and a girl! At various times when David looks at his children throughout the film, such as when he tucks them into their cribs at night, he sees the dead brother and sister, bullet holes in their foreheads, lying there in place of his children.

These scenes are well done and very unnerving. The children also have a tendency to cause accidents, which start to seem more and more intentional, that injure David and often come close to killing him. It appears to the young officer that his kids are possessed by the vengeful spirits of the two suspects he killed, though his wife refuses to believe this. He also has to worry about Hung Long, on death row but still threatening to kill his family.

This character is great, a cunning psychopath kept securely locked up like Hannibal Lecter - because he's just as dangerous. As a few unlucky guards have discovered, getting too close to his cell bars can lead to the loss of a few

Roy Lau and Veronica Yip (*Vendetta*)

fingers or maybe even an eye. In one great scene, Hung bites off a couple of fingers and manages to slide the guy's wedding band off and secrete it in his mouth before spitting the fingers out! Later, he'll unbend the ring and manage to use it to pick a lock. Definitely not the kind of guy you want to piss off.

I won't give away any more of the plot, as the film deserves to be seen fresh, without too much prior knowledge. While not perfect, *VENDETTA* is an excellent film with a great story, strong direction and acting, and a simple but effective score. Tommy Wong (best known as Eddie from *KILLER*) is great as Hung Long, I wish there were more scenes with him in the film.

Popular heavyset actor Kent Cheng (*RUN AND KILL*; *SEX AND ZEN*; *TO BE NUMBER ONE*; and many others) is also a welcome presence as Ming, David's partner and best friend. Throughout the film he tries to help David by giving him Buddha statues, prayer beads, Fung-shui fish, and other religious charms meant to ward off the evil spirits possessing the children. What I found interesting is that, unlike in most other Hong Kong films with supernatural elements, these religious items seem to have no effect throughout most of the film.

The one flaw with the film is the unnecessary supernatural pyrotechnics during the last minutes. The film would have been much stronger without them. While the viewer is as convinced as David that the kids are possessed, it could still be argued that it's all in his mind, the result of a traumatic experience, and that everything could be explained away in non-supernatural terms. The powerlessness of the religious items throughout the film could also lead one to question whether

the kids are actually possessed or are just really disturbed and antisocial.

The laserdisc copy I watched (from Nlei Ah Laser Disc Co. Ltd.) had a few noticeable cuts during some of the violent scenes, but it appears these may have been made on theatrical prints so that the film could be released with the more accessible "Category 2" rating. Even with the cuts, though, this is still an effective, disturbing film that will linger in your memory. After watching *VENDETTA* and *INSANITY*, I'm eagerly awaiting Leung Siu Hung's next project. He's definitely a talent to watch!

## THAT'S MONEY aka DETECTIVE AND A LADY DIRECTED BY BENNY WONG REVIEW BY STEVE FENTONE

This lightweight action-comedy is from a HK director I know nothing about, one "Benny C.Y. Wong." I'd date the film from about 1987-90 judging by its surplus of brazen Wooisms.

Plot-wise, *THAT'S MONEY* concerns a naive officeworker named Paul, who with his friends gains possession of \$1-million (US) in syndicate drug money stolen after a big morphine deal. Needless to say, nasty mob boss Jimmy Wong wants the cash back, and sicks his strongarm boys on Paul and co-workers in a succession of attempts to regain it.

Though pretty short on the rampant gun-fu you might expect from a Woo wannabe, the action does cram in a satisfying amount of high velocity martial arts (edited along the manic lines of Yuen Biao and Cynthia Rothrock's *RIGHTING WRONGS*). Techniques include quick succession intercutting of fast and slo-mo shots of the same stunt seen from two different angles. Of late such methods have become cliché, but when done well they still work. And after all, we can always use one more slick John Woo imitator, no matter how mediocre.

Comedic filler is mostly non-intrusive, but some scenes -- especially when our hero and heroine teeter precariously on the edge of a cliff in their car -- go on too long and are far too inconsequential to the plot. Much more cynical laughs are provoked by the unpredictably violent acts of Wong the mob boss. For instance, while playing pool he is unsuccessful in sinking the desired ball. Nearby, a musician plays mood music on a violin, and, upon noticing his boss' annoyance at failing to hit the corner pocket, tries

to lighten things up by belting out a happy-go-lucky fiddle tune. Unamused, Mr. Wong tells the violinist with a brutal cuestick swipe to the side of his skull. An almost Argento-like slow motion glimpse of splattering scalp is inserted, and the fiddler goes down like a sack of shit (still playing!).

Later, the musician makes an encore appearance — now rendered a drooling, tongue-lolling simpleton by his head injury — to torment the captive heroine with an off-key violin number (violin violence?). In other moments of black comedy, at his slightest displeasure the mobster blows away his own men with a large caliber handgun.

Locker-room level erection and lesbian jokes are prominent, ensuring an overall goofy tone, but violence becomes progressively harder-edged, and the foot-and-fisticuffs-fought finale spirals to a scenery trashin' frenzy. One of our heroines (there are actually three, high-kicking kung fu kittens all, including Hui Ying Hung) stakes a guy using a sharp fence-picket. Somebody else does a face-flip through a glass coffee table. A vast explosion with stuntmen leaping from upper-storey windows ahead of erupting flames provides the adrenalinized climax. As with so many HK action flicks, it's the dynamism of the editing that makes this one click. Of course, the effortless aerobatics of the three supple she-cats also help.

Like **RIGHTING WRONGS**, **THAT'S MONEY** is a "small" film, but it brims with enough kickass stuntwork to fill any ten Hollywood B-pictures. From the cheap thrills on display here, Benny Wong looks like a director to watch in the future.

## **RIGHTING WRONGS (1986)**

**DIRECTED BY YUEN KWEI**

**REVIEW BY JEFF SEGAL**

Action director Yuen Kwei's (Corey Yuen) **RIGHTING WRONGS** impacted against this viewer like a bullet through the head. I smugly expected the film to follow routine Hong Kong crime thriller plotting. Instead, the thoughtful but relentlessly cruel production shocked me into respect. Its white knuckle scenario had been coupled with a large amount of violent setpieces. By the final confrontation, I was no longer a viewer in search of a casual action fix. **RIGHTING WRONGS** revises the grittier elements of **THE STAR CHAMBER** (1983), **DEATH WISH** (1974) and **MAGNUM FORCE** (1973) with searing results.

**RIGHTING WRONGS** immediately grabs viewers when its main protagonist, prosecutor Hsia Ling-Ching (Yuen Biao, Jackie Chan's sidekick in an unusually grim role), witnesses the execution style butchery of his mentor. The enraged attorney engages his enemies in a mobile gunbattle which results in the thugs cremating alive in their flaming automobile. During the opening credits, a black assassin massacres an adult witness and his screaming family. Their high rise apartment is blown up. Stunned by this news, Hsia shudders with rage as his case against sneering gangster Chou Ting Kuang goes to pieces. After a conversation with a senior justice, Hsia decides to practice vigilantism. The lithe attorney begins pounding Chou's mob.

We are then introduced to tough lady cop Shih U-yi, a blonde also known as Cindy (Cynthia Rothrock at her most butch). For an appetizer,



Yuen Biao recuperating from one of his stunts

she closes down an illegal gambling hall using fists, feet and loose furniture. For dinner, Cindy's oily superintendent Wang Chin-Wai assigns her to the vigilante case. The officer's partner is a slovenly male cop, Bad Egg. Their prime suspect is the attorney named Hsia.

The remaining *RIGHTING WRONGS* thrills begin to ricochet around in a cat and mouse game. Between duels with the obsessive Cindy, Hsia must fight off Chou's legbreakers. Though victorious in court, the mobster felt he lost face because of the attorney and would like to return the favor... and splinter bones in the process (and United States lawyers think they have it rough). Hsia's martial art skills save him from death.

*RIGHTING WRONGS* deviates from this intense, if predictable, scenario when police superintendent Wang Chin-wai is revealed to be the cold blooded mastermind who sheltered Hsia's case against Chou. The bad cop did not want his profitable arrangement with the underworld ruined. He was willing to use assassins (the irony here is that the first hitman was dressed as an officer).

However, Chou has become a liability Wang slaughters the boss and his bodyguards. The killer turns on Hsia, Cindy and any innocent who strays too close.

The final conclusion of violence leaves dead all of Wang's assassins (including martial artist Karen Shapherd). Cindy is murdered while battling her corrupt boss. Hsia and Wang conclude their death duel above the ocean in an out-of-control private airplane. The attorney crunches Wang's skull and leaps from the plunging plane. When Hsia finally smacks against the water hundreds of feet below, he bursts.

The bleakness in *RIGHTING WRONGS* may in some way approximate reality, edging it beyond simple entertainment. For this reason, *RIGHTING WRONGS* should be ranked with the similarly unnerving HK thrills found throughout *THE BIG HEAT* (1988), *FATAL TERMINATION* (1989), and *THE FIRST TIME IS THE LAST TIME* (1988).

The textured direction of *RIGHTING WRONGS* also raises it above your average modestly budgeted potboiler. Yuen Kwai's film is professional looking and peppered with striking details. During the opening minutes, the lawbook handed to Hsia by his mentor is shot, introducing a recurring theme of violated justice. The torn tome later turns up in a battle between Hsia and the assassin who slew his witnesses. During the exorbitant parking garage combat, the camera

suddenly focuses on the lawyer's reflection in a tire hubcap just before the car rolls toward him. *RIGHTING WRONGS'* nonstop gun, contact weapon and martial arts are usually serious (unlike most of the Jackie Chan movie duels Yuen Biao participated in).

Surprisingly, Yuen Biao more than delivers the smoldering rage required for a role such as Hsia Ling-Ching. Few fans truly aware of crime will be unable to identify with the lethal lawyer. For Hsia, self justice can be the only way of reforming what he perceives to be a corrupt and ineffectual legal system. Yet, the young man is an attorney trained to uphold the law, regardless of its imperfections. Hsia's black suited missions against the Thads may result in relatively few criminal corpses but their implications outweigh the greater bodycount attained by run of the mill shoot-em-ups.

Equally unyielding is Cynthia Rothrock's character, an early role in her movie career. Her stiffness contributes to the role of Cindy, forging this blonde fury into an unforgiving symbol of law enforcement.

Each struggle was painfully performed and skillfully assembled on film. The wirework has kept a lower profile than in many Hong Kong mobster pictures. Yuen Biao and Rothrock deliver impressive moves against one another and various amounts of enemies. All factors considered, *RIGHTING WRONGS* is a bargain for any action movie lover.

## **SUPERCOP 2: PROJECT S** **DIRECTED BY STANLEY TONG** **REVIEWED BY WILLIAM WILSON**

One of the many reasons that Hong Kong action films will always be superior to the Western competition is the fact that they can be considered "equal opportunity" films. There are literally dozens of women who can kick, flip and take a fall just as good as their male co-stars. One of the most famous and popular of these kung fu ladies is Michelle Yeoh (aka Michelle Khan).

In 1991, Michelle Yeoh teamed up with Jackie Chan to star in *SUPERCOP: POLICE STORY 3*. Michelle starred as Yang Chien Hua, a Chinese police commander. The film not only showcases Yeoh's amazing martial arts skill but also her acting ability.

In *PROJECT S* Yeoh reprises her role as Yang Chien Hua. This film is a direct sequel to *SUPERCOP: POLICE STORY 3*, however, the

Michelle Yeoh (Michelle Khan)



point of emphasis now turns away from Jackie Chan's character and focuses on Yeoh's.

The film opens with Yeoh's character Hua arriving at the scene of a terrorist takeover. Disguised as a doctor sent up to aid a heart attack victim, Hua, with the help of boyfriend and fellow police officer Cheng Feng (Yu Wing Gong), takes the terrorists by storm. This opening scene alone is filled with more jaw dropping action than what you will see in a lifetime of Steven Segal movies. People literally fall from fifth story windows.

Following this spectacular opening, the plot begins to unfold. The story bears more than a passing resemblance to *SUPERCOP POLICE STORY 3*. Hua is sent to Hong Kong, as Jackie Chan's *POLICE STORY 3* character was sent to mainland China, to help out the local police. The specific case involves the intended robbery of a bank. Problems arise when, unbeknownst to Hua, it is revealed that Cheng Feng is a key member of a gang hired to help pull off the robbery. The gang was hired by Roger Davidson (Ain Guernier), the designer of the bank's vault. He

feels that with his and Feng's gang and his knowledge of the vault's structure, the robbery will be flawless.

Throughout the film there are many close calls as Hua and the two rookie cops whom she teams up with try to track down the criminals. In one particular scene, Feng must decide whether to attack or retreat when he notices that Hua is one of the three people attacking his gang's headquarters. Feng eventually retreats and just barely escapes recognition by Hua.

All of these close calls lead to an action packed climax set in the bank's underground vault. Hua, with the help of rookie officer Lung, played by Fan Siu Wang (RIKKI O), must try to stop the already in progress robbery. It seems that Davidson plans to double cross Feng and tries to escape with all the money. This does not sit well with Feng, who chases Davidson into the sewer and subway systems, along the planned escape routes. They have a tense showdown, in which Feng shoots Davidson, after which Hua arrives to confront Feng. During this confrontation, there is a tense scene in which both Hua and Feng end up pointing guns directly at each other. Hua asks Feng how he felt he could lead such a life, for which he has no other answer than to point a gun at her. The film then culminates in an unusual downbeat ending as Hua must watch Feng die.

*PROJECT 3* is indeed an enjoyable movie. The film is competently directed by Stanley Tong, who also helmed *SUPERCOP: POLICE STORY 3*. The action scenes are well choreographed, with the scenes in the bank vault being the highlight. During these scenes Yeoh gets ample time to display her fighting ability as she takes on a seven foot tall gang member. This trend of fighting larger than life villains can also be seen in Bruce Lee's *GAME OF DEATH* and, more recently, in Jackie Chan's *CITYHUNTER*. Fan Siu Wang, RIKKI O himself, also proves himself as a great fighter, showing he doesn't need the power of RIKKI O's punch to fight off the bad guys.

For fans of Jackie Chan, who also serves as executive producer, there is an all to brief cameo appearance. Chan, playing his character from *POLICE STORY 3*, foils a robbery attempt by a group of thugs. Did I mention that he did it all in drag? This scene is quite funny, but feels out of place with the rest of the movie. It seems to have been added just to satisfy Chan fans, who would have easily been satisfied by just watching Michelle Yeoh in action.

Kinnosuke Yanabara (Ogami) and Katsutaka Nakakawa (Daigoro)  
**Lone Wolf and Child**  
 (Second Series)



## Three Wolves: The Return of Itto Ogami

by Max Allan Collins

*NOTE: In a previous two-part ATC article, author Collins explored the six-part Swords of Vengeance (Baby Cart) film series and the Kozure Okami comic-book that inspired it.*

The major disappointment of the *Swords of Vengeance* series is that it leaves unresolved the story of its protagonists wandering samurai Itto Ogami and his son Daigoro. The Lone Wolf's thirst for revenge against his arch-enemy Retzudo Yagyuu remains unquenched, and the counter crusade by the Yagyuu clan remains a very real and constant threat to father and son.

Fans of the epic *gekiga* (dramatic picture story) upon which the six films are based are especially frustrated knowing that writer Kazuo Koike and artist Goseki Kojima did indeed

provide a satisfying resolution for their sprawling tale. But that resolution didn't appear in print until 1978, while *Daigoro! We're Going into Hell!*, the final *Sword of Vengeance* (Baby Cart) film, was made in 1973.

The frustrated fans of *Lone Wolf and Child* should be pleasantly surprised to learn that Video Search of Miami has unearthed three more, post-*Swords of Vengeance* film versions of the saga: *Baby Cart Second Series: Through A Child's Eyes*, *Lone Wolf Cop: The Sex Doll Case* and *Lone Wolf and Child: Final Conflict*.

*Through A Child's Eyes* is the first of ten features that began appearing in Japan in 1981, thus far, it's the only title in the series translated by Video Search, although if enough interest is shown in this first release, the others should follow.

The second series of films (judging by *Through A Child's Eyes*, at least) is derived from the Kozure Okami television series, which began in 1973. The films apparently were theatrical releases, but assembled in the manner of the 1950s Disney *Zorro* and MGM *Man from Uncle* movies - that is, patched together from TV episodes.

*Through A Child's Eyes*, however, is at least carefully patched together, in fact seamlessly so, and far superior to a similar pieced-together assemblage from the same TV series, *Fugitive Samurai* (1984), an out-of-print SVS laser disc. *Through A Child's Eyes* contains some (but not

all) of the same footage as the sleep-inducing *Fugitive Samurai*, but also includes a good deal of footage particularly action sequences - not seen in the other, lesser film.

Kinnosuke Yoroizuka plays Ito Ogami and Kazutaka Nishikawa is Daigoro. A sole director is credited (Ryugi Tanaka) but that seems unlikely, as footage has been gleaned for *Through A Child's Eyes* from at least four episodes of the TV show, and *Fugitive Samurai* credits two directors (Minoru Matsushima and Akiron Matsuo).

Whether writer Koike was involved in the scripting or not, fans of the manga version of *Lone Wolf* will find the TV adaptation (which of course is reflected in *Through A Child's Eyes*) even more faithful to the comics themselves than the *Sword of Vengeance* (Baby Cart) series. It's as if the filmmakers used the *gekiga* as storyboards.



Yoshio Umeyama (*Lone Wolf Cop: Sex Doll Case*)

Kinnosuke Yorozuya's main deficiency in the role of Ito Ogami is that he is not Tomisaburo Wakayama, he lacks the previous, more portly Lone Wolf's sullen charisma. But he more closely resembles the comic-book's taller Lone Wolf, and carries himself with quiet dignity; his is a sad, noble bearing.

If anything, Katsutaka Nishikawa is an even better Daigoro than the very good Akihiro Tomikawa, the wide-eyed mugging the latter was occasionally prone to (particularly in *Baby Cert #6*) is replaced by the new actor's disturbing stone face. He too has a sad noble dignity, his sorrowful eyes and stony expression not cracking even when the bad guys are burning him alive.

Fans of the comic-book will be delighted by the main titles, which use Goseki Kojima's drawings as a backdrop (identical to the television series opening, incidentally). And fans of the previous film series will be gratified by an opening that sets this film up as following, chronologically, the previous films, using flashbacks from early TV episodes to fill in the blanks.

There is much good to be said about *Through A Child's Eyes*. The battle scenes - while lacking the cartoons geysers of blood of *Sword of Vengeance* - are well-staged and effective, Kinnosuke Yorozuya making a convincing Ito Ogami, moving with grace and skill. The climatic duel with Retsudo Yagyuu's wandering son Gunbei is effectively staged, the sad-eyed child looking on as his father does battle in a pounding rain (this sequence was the saving grace of *Fugitive Samurai*, by the way, although its dubbed, rewritten dialogue is far inferior to the real thing provided by Video Search's translators, Amy Asai and Tom Welser).

On the downside, an over-use of zooms and a cheesy organ that undermines an otherwise serviceable score reminds us of the film's TV roots; and the lack of the previous film series' flamboyant blood effects will discourage the gore-hounds among us. Nonetheless, the TV series - currently unavailable from any source - was a worthwhile adaptation of its fine source material, and *Through A Child's Eyes* indicates the film compilations make a first-rate way to access that adaptation. This writer hopes fan response to *Through A Child's Eyes* will be strong enough to inspire Video Search to translate the other films.

Lone Wolf fans who bemoan the relative bloodlessness of *Through a Child's Eyes* may revel in *Lone Wolf Cop: The Sex Doll Case*, which (in addition to having one of the most

delightfully sleazy titles in all of "trash" cinema) features the trademark gendering blood of the original films and then some.

The premise is terrific: because of "foreign influences" and the growth of Yakuza gangs, a special police unit, Project Lone Wolf, is granted the freedom to "kill unconditionally" in the manner of the *Kashakunin* (executioner) of feudal times. Ito Ogami, of course, was the shogun's *Kashakunin*.

The man in charge is a tough, heavy-set uniformed cop, Ruyugi Shimamura (Yoshio Umeyan), who is physically reminiscent of the original Ito Ogami, Tomisaburo Wakayama. This modern Lone Wolf gathers seven handsome young uniformed cops, and together they go underground, with their leader posing as a flagrantly gay club owner and his handsome young minors the gigolos he provides to older, rich women. Supposedly running this sleazy bar provides Shimamura and his unit a good cover, and gets them next to the gangster element but, frankly, it's not very logical, and has nothing at all to do with presenting a modern version of Lone Wolf. Are the seven interchangeably handsome assistants supposed to represent Daigoro?

Fortunately, the movie-making itself is slick, the girls are pretty and frequently unclothed, the bad guys are nasty (particularly a lovely dragon lady), and the action scenes are well-mounted (if not as convincing as the grittier Hong Kong variety). A particularly strong final shoot-out scene in a warehouse is easily worth the price of admission. The modern-day white slavery/blackmail plot, with its S&M elements, will please exploitation fans, and there's no doubt that *Sex Doll Murder Case* delivers what its subtitle promises. It's the main title - the notion that this will be a modern variation on Lone Wolf and Child - that isn't lived up to. Fun film or not, this is a woefully missed opportunity.

A much higher road is taken in the 1992 *Lone Wolf & Child: The Final Conflict*, a big-budget production that not only rivals the original *Sword of Vengeance* series, but in many respects surpasses it. Again, exploitation fans may be disappointed, as the geysers of blood are nowhere in sight, in fact the beautifully staged action sequences are purposefully undermined by a somber, lyrical score, that indicates the path Ito Ogami has taken is not one of glory, but tragedy.

More than anything, *Final Conflict* is a re-examination of the source material, for the viewer familiar with that source material, this film



Masakazu Tamura (Ogami) and Yushi Shibata (Daigoro)

Lone Wolf And Child: The Final Conflict



consistently surprises with new approaches to situations and characters.

The lean, handsome Ito Ogami of Masakazu Tamura does not stoically hide his love of Daigoro (Yushi Shibata); his emotions are worn as openly as previous Ito Ogamis have hidden theirs. The famous choose-between-the-bell-or-the-sword sequence is set up, then played out in a different, yet entirely satisfying manner. Retoado Yagyu (Tatsuya Nakaya) is no longer the white-bearded, white-maned human devil, but a tortured soul, with a striking (and, for fans of the original movie series, subconsciously disturbing) physical resemblance to the late Tomisaburo Wakayama.

Perhaps most shockingly, this is a baby-cart movie without a baby-cart! Possibly abandoning this famous aspect of the tale because it was too gimmicky or comic-booky, director Shou Inoue may also be focusing on the post-baby cart years of this father and son. While the entire saga is compressed into one nearly two-hour package, a passage of time between the "origin" of Lone Wolf and Child, and when we join father and son as they walk their tragic, lonely path, might well have been filled by those other, baby-cart adventures chronicled in *Swords of Vengeance*.

More likely the director is re-thinking the entire saga, paying more attention to the spirit than the letter. He fills the screen with lovely images of nature as observed by young Daigoro, even the

scenes of brutality have their own sad, bittersweet poetry (thankfully, the Video Search transfer is a crisp, widescreen one). The episodic nature of the film suggests both the episodic nature of the original source material, and that we are seeing only portions of Ogami and Daigoro's much longer journey.

The conclusion of Lone Wolf's quest for vengeance--and Retoado Yagyu's parallel quest--finally reaches the motionpicture screen, albeit in a manner that departs from the specifics of the gekisource material, even while paying it tribute. If anything, this is a more satisfying, deeper and more meaningful resolution to the battle between these two samurai. To discuss this in any more depth would be to spoil one of the most rewarding sequences in recent cinema.

But I will say that the final image of Daigoro, alone on the sandy beach where his father recently fought a duel, is the single most beautiful, and haunting image, in any one of the films, or in the comic-book, either.

It is tempting to say that if you see one Lone Wolf film, it should be this one; but beginners are advised to start with *Sword Of Vengeance* (Baby Cart Series), continue on with *Through a Child's Eyes*, detour if you must into *Sex Doll Murder Case*, before encountering the single best film ever derived from Kazuo Koike and Goseki Kojima's epic work.

It's so good it may spoil the others for you.

# 1+2 = Paradise

## Another Look At Trash Animation

by Jim McLennan

One of the delights of Japanese animation is the sheer volume of stuff out there - just waiting to be discovered. Whereas, in most other genres, there is no real unexplored territory - the chances of stumbling across an 'Evil Dead' are pretty slim - anime represents a positive Amazonia of obscure delights, nightmares and good old-fashioned weirdness.

1+2=Paradise is a case in point: the tapes I own are quite possibly the only originals to leave Japan - but it is unquestionably several notches above the usual material that makes up much of the anime officially released in the West. It is also perhaps the most politically incorrect piece of entertainment of any form I have ever seen.

The opening sequence is of the hero, Yūsuke Yamamoto, clad in armor and defeating a range of nasty beauties in a castle. Having done so, he is confronted by a beautiful topless woman, who then turns into a naga, sprouting further pairs of breasts down the length of her body.

Our hero wakes with a start. 'Phew - he says, 'Must've overdone it on the Nintendo'.

But wait - what are these twin nymphettas doing in his bed?

He runs out of the bedroom, screaming, only to find himself back on the castle drawbridge. The twins have pursued him, metamorphosing into creatures with their heads between their legs. He slams awake again. The twins are behind him. He's off once more, followed this time by a flock of bouncing breasts, none of which are actually ATTACHED to anyone. Etcetera, etcetera.

After the first two minutes, it feels as if someone has been slamming your head off a concrete wall. But let me summarize. The twin babes (blonde, teenage, and stacked like a four-pack of 1/11 Hindenburg models) are real, and are called Rika and Yuka Nakamura. They are student nurses who have been invited to stay in Yūsuke's house by his father, a gynecologist. Dr. Yamamoto is weird. He keeps a coelecanth in a tank in his office. Maybe this is standard practice for gynecologists - I really wouldn't know, but in any case, the arrival of the twins is an underhand attempt by him to cure Yūsuke of his fear of women, so that he can follow in his father's footsteps.

The reason for this phobia is that, when he was very young, he was playing doctors and nurses with the girls next door. They took his clothes off. 'Eugh! What's that thing dangling down? WE don't have one of those. It must be a boy! Hang on, we'll cut it off for you...' Coming within an inch of being neutered, perhaps understandably, had a somewhat unpleasant effect on Yūsuke's sexuality. Like he decided not to have one.

Father explains that there is only room for one of the twins to stay, and that Yūsuke has to choose between them. While not exactly sadistic to see his castrators returning, he's too polite to reject them entirely, as they've got nowhere else to stay, and it IS Christmas, after all (though why this should make much difference in a non-Christian country like Japan is obscure!).

Needless to say, they both make strenuous efforts to impress him, beginning by doing the housework dressed in the sort of costume normally found only in the better class of women-in-prison flick. However, while neither Rika



nor Yuka are really very good at cleaning, both exhibit spectacular talents in other areas, such as losing their clothes, squealing, and falling off ladders to land, crotch first, on Yūsuke's face. He ends up doing the cleaning himself, mostly as an exercise in damage limitation, while the girls watch admiringly.

Their subsequent attempts at cooking prove no more successful: while potatoes are peeled, they are simultaneously reduced to the size of a marble. Things boil over and/or explode. Cue more giggling.

The evening draws to a close, and Yūsuke carefully barricades his room to keep the twins out. Unfortunately, they are already in the room, so all he is doing is making escape impossible. He finds this out, when he discovers they are warming his pajamas for him... He wakes the next morning, wondering if it was all a dream. In a word, no.

They're still here, and he's still unable to decide which one to get rid of. Father willingly extends the trial period, and we discover that the girls' admiration for Yūsuke goes back to when he rescued them from a stray dog, an event that he had forgotten, just as much as they had forgotten the incident with the scalpel and the scissors.

The climax of the first episode occurs in the bathroom.

After an especially spectacular tumble - as I said, these girls are GOOD at such things - Yūsuke ends up at the bottom of the bath, bound VERY tightly to Yuka with the shower hose, almost unable to move. And the bath is now filling up with water.

There are only two escape routes. At the risk of stretching a literary metaphor, he can either head up through a narrow pass between two firm-but-yielding peaks, or go down, into a hot and humid, forested valley. And Yūsuke has never been a man fond of foreign parts. How will he cope?

The delight of this episode is it's sheer, unrelenting, cheerful tackiness. Yes, the girls are utter airheads, but charges of sexism must be partly countered by the fact that the original manga was created by a woman, Junko Uemura.

In addition, Yūsuke is just as socially inadequate in his way, which is doubly amusing given that he is a parody of the likely intended target audience.

The result is something far closer to Benny Hill than you would ever have thought the Japanese capable of creating. And regardless of whether or

not it is morally reprehensible, it is undeniably funny.

The second part is not quite the same. This is something of a mixed blessing. Admittedly, there is only so much one can do with giggling, silicone-pumped teenagers - at least, with regard to Great Cinematic Art and the thirty minutes duration of the first part probably just about exhausted the possibilities. Thus, the sequel is forced to fall back on the old standby known as 'having a plot'.

Once again, we're back at school (some day, I will review a series that doesn't take place at an education establishment - just as soon as I can find one...). Studies are interrupted by the arrival in town of a flying circus; the ringmaster's daughter takes a great shine to Yūsuke, so much so that she kidnaps him.

It's up to Rika and Yuka to save him from her whipwielding clutches and help Yūsuke escape out of the enormous castle-like Big Top which is the circus's base.

Cramping all this into half an hour inevitably means there is less time for the supreme incorrectness that was the original's over-riding purpose. Sure, you still get Yūsuke and babe crammed together in a cupboard, but this seems more like a by-the-numbers nod, instead of the borderline sleazy that provided much of the charm in the first episode, together with the novelty value.

Not that episode two is without merit - it's still very amusing, and the animation is generally just as sharp and well-executed if simply isn't as defiantly trashy.

The quest for further volumes continues, but no matter what happens, 1+2 = Paradise stands as a good example of the strengths of anime - and these don't really have a lot to do with giant robots...

**Credits** Yūsuke Yamamoto - Kappeli  
Yamaguchi (best known as the male half of Ranma, in 'Ranma 1/2') Rika Nakamura -  
Chieko Honda, Yuka Nakamura - Ritsuko  
Nagao, Dr. Yamamoto - Takashi Tomiyama

*Jim McLennan is the chief honcho for TRASH CITY, an eclectic mix of sleaze and cinema. Issue #14/15 has come out and features more of Jim's anime observations, the feature films of Hayao Miyazaki, the 'guinea pig' films, and more in its 96 plus digest size pages. Send \$6.00 in US funds to Jim McLennan, 34 Perran Road, Tufts Hill, London, SW2 3DL, UK.*

# Captured For Sex

An Indepth Review By Travis Crawford

*"Modern Japanese pornography is overwhelmingly sadistic, as anyone can find out by spending 5 minutes in any Japanese bookshop. This is not a new phenomenon . . . In many Western porn movies, it is at least sometimes suggested that mutual enjoyment is part of the sex act. In Japan, this is rarely the case . . . It becomes clear what these films are really all about: a desperate fear of masculine inadequacy."*

Ian Buruma, *Behind the Mask* (Meridian Books, 1984)



The above quote from British author Ian Buruma's study of Japanese sexuality -- although a bit on the Japanophobic side for my own tastes -- still serves as an interesting, indeed essential primer for an excursion into the often harrowing realm of that country's pornographic film industry. Those accustomed to only Western "erotic" cinema (the term scarcely applies to these two films under review) will certainly be shocked -- most likely repulsed -- by the likes of the Japanese porn film CAPTURED FOR SEX and its creatively-titled sequel, CAPTURED FOR SEX 2. I'm under no delusion that these films are in any way atypical or exceptional examples of Japanese "pink" (adult) films, but I also feel that their undoubted similarity to other sado-masochistic sex films from the country better serves to illuminate the basic misogynist traits and sexual fetishes that unite most of Japanese S&M-oriented pornography. If nothing else, these two films are perhaps better made on a purely technical level than others of their type. My regret is that I unfortunately don't have the space available to provide more in-depth background on Japanese sexual culture and psychological interpretations of their erotic imagery (fear of female empowerment, return-to-the-womb fantasies, idealization of the maternal figure, et al.); perhaps ATC is not the proper forum for such

an analysis anyway [You got that right, Ed.]. Given the limitations noted, I still feel that the content of the films speak for themselves.

CAPTURED FOR SEX has a fragmented, meandering narrative which actually works well with its dreamlike tone and luxuriant, fantastic visual style. Young Sakae (Sak?) is given a ride by male companion Shinkichi to her dental appointment; upon her arrival, the dentist -- a long-maned dominatrix-type -- has her two mute lesbian hygienists drug Sakae into a comatose stupor, whereupon she is promptly disrobed, flogged, and masturbated to consciousness, just as the dominatrix magically summons a "phantom" clone of Shinkichi to "rape" her (I wrap the term in quotes because, in typical Asian sex-flick style, Sakae's initial tearful protests soon give way to a mewling, submissive ambivalence; later in the film, she is told to admit she "enjoyed the rape," and Buruma -- among others -- has commented on how rape victims in these movies often ludicrously "fall in love" with their attackers). This lengthy groping session is followed by increasingly more surreal, nightmarish hallucinations (?) experienced by Sakae, as she stumbles inexplicably from a room without an exit to a deserted train car, from the middle of a vast desert to a fetishist's heaven torture chamber. In each of her bizarre encounters, she is inevitably pursued by her leather-clad femme tormentor (the film's sole amusing moment comes from Sakae's cry of "Help! Save me from this lesbian!" during a moment of oral gratification), who eventually captures Sakae and Shinkichi -- with the aid of her ever-present machine-gun-toting hygienist cohorts -- and carries them to her lair of whips, pulleys, chains and assorted other blood-drawing marital aids.

In its onerous disregard for narrative logic and its surprisingly seductive, sleek visuals, CAPTURED FOR SEX actually explores the complex dynamics of sado-masochism -- and the

pains and joys of perversion -- far more successfully -- not to mention watchably -- than its successor (which is more a "horror" film). If its bargain-basement surrealism never quite overcomes its banal sex-flick origins and Jesus Franco-styled padding (even at only 77 minutes, the film still has time to show us a three-minute long real-time shot of Sakae tying together torn sheets, and I doubt it was done as a homage to Chantal Akerman's minimalist epic *JEANNE DIELMAN*), its not for lack of haunting moments. There are many sleazy sequences oddly transformed into images of striking visual power: the initial sex scene is eerily isolated in a metallic womb-like enclosure, the deserted train ridden by the two lovers is suddenly populated by passengers chanting "Rape", the doors of the imprisoning room open to exaggerated projections of advancing trucks and lovemaking sessions superimposed over psychedelically-swirling flowerbuds, the couple suddenly find themselves making love in an oasis of sand. The film's expansive visual style is no doubt helped by the freedom of its shot compositions. Although Sakae spends literally the entire film completely nude, her pubic hair is not blocked by strategically-placed flower vases, nor is anyone else's genital region optically censored by the usual Japanese-video puritanism on this matter (I saw the French print provided with subtitled by Video Search of Miami). Indeed, there are many moments in *CAPTURED FOR SEX* -- the usual array of gynecological probing and ejaculation shots -- that clearly label it as a *hardcore* film (unlike its sequel).

Ironically, the film's closing moments provide both a direct link to more brutal sexuality evoked in its immediate sequel, as well as the film's most uniquely memorable -- even touching moment. Shinkichi is forced to watch as the dominatrix figure has poor Sakae suspended upside-down, whipped and pierced with needles until she releases her bladder. Then just as the film's sadism reaches its apex (which is positively restrained compared to its follow-up), a shockingly moving, almost poignant encounter occurs. Sakae and Shinkichi merge for an impromptu, semi-conscious bout of dual oral sex ('89, for all you Penthouse Forum subscribers out there), the loving and consensual nature of which so upsets the repulsed dominatrix that she spontaneously combusts (!), taking her cat-o-rine-tails cronies down with her. The intertwined lovers choose to remain in the fire, agreeing to

place 'mind over matter and ignore the heat.' Perhaps an indirect critique of the philosophy of sadism that has heretofore permeated the film?

Well maybe not.

It's a hell of a lot more erotic than anything that appears in the terrifying, borderline-unwatchable *CAPTURED FOR SEX 2*, the only film I've seen capable of making the sexual encounters of *TOKYO DECADENCE* and Pasolini's *SALO* look like a David Hamilton soft-core romp. In tone, director Masaru Ijuin's sequel couldn't be more different from its predecessor: the dreamy *mise-en-scene* of the original is replaced here by a film that appears flat, dark, hard, cold, claustrophobic, ugly. Even the hypnotic Shamisen drones on #1's soundtrack are now replaced by jarring *Musique-concrete* electronic noises. The film has no time for somnambulist wanderings -- it's too busy concentrating on its "story."

Shingo and his fiancée Miki are trapped in the woods because their car breaks down. They are rescued by an unnamed, bearded gentelman (Shingo calls him the 'devil'), who has them stay in his isolated house. Shortly thereafter, Miki is stripped at knifepoint, threatened, forced to fellate her bound boyfriend while being raped from behind by the Devil. During the torture sessions,



*Captured For Sex 2*

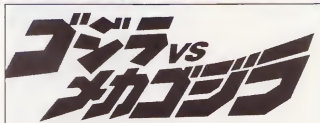
which follow, Shingo discovers he quite likes this treatment of his lover ("I can never go back to the way I was. The man released me from the conventional world and helped me discover the true extent of my dreams"), so he persuades the Devil to take him on as his "apprentice" and so, the two men then kidnap two additional victims, a young tennis student named Michino, and Lisa, Miki's friend. They are also raped and tortured. Shingo begins to get megalomaniacal with the whip, and so kills the Devil so that he may 'own' the three objects of pleasure himself. THE END. If the generalities of the 'plot' seem offensive enough, one must keep in mind that – despite Shingo's grim voice-over narration and trapped-in-the-woods setting – CAPTURED FOR SEX 2 is not intended as a conflict-based suspense thriller. Shingo and the Devil are the 'sympathetic' protagonists of the film (indeed, they even develop an unexplored homoerotic male-bond of teacher-pupil), and the viewer is invited to identify with their actions. If you thought the story-line was bad, here are the specifics:

Throughout the film, the three women (I feel no compulsion to distinguish them as individuals since the movie certainly doesn't) are – among the indignities: raped; whipped until bloody; used as human chopping blocks for vegetables (with which they will be forcibly penetrated); bound and gagged; burned with hot candlewax (and often just the flame itself); affixed with bells, clamps and pin cushions on their nipples; constantly degraded with sexual threats ("Isn't it cute how the girl screams!" and "Your girlfriend gets wet fast, she's already soaked" being two highlights); strung up like animals while flogged; publicly shaved ("You'll look just like when you were born," the Devil notes, a line eerily echoed in Bigas Luna's LULU); penetrated and probed by various gynecological, urological, and proctological makeshift-torture devices, including light scopes; pierced by blow dart needles on their bleeding whip scars; forced to engage in lesbian liaisons and eat out of dog-food bowls; affixed with dog leashes and a truly horrifying leather facial mask which forces the mouth open to full-width; tortured with dozens of miniature clamps adhered to their nude bodies, and occasionally just flat out bitten and beaten.

Unsurprisingly, the sexual humiliations intensify as the film continues (yes, there's more), culminating in two scenes of such staggering perversity I hesitate to even describe them (but I will) – at one point, Miki is given an enema with a

hypodermic plunger, following which her anus is corked up to prevent defecation; she is left there for an eternity to writhe in pain until Shingo finally "liberates" her, in a moment of such scatological bravura I may never touch any cocoa products till the next decade. The other one I'm not sure I even fully understood: something to do with female genitalia (or perhaps, anus), a funnel, a bag of marbles, red wine, and an explosive backwash referred to as a "Cocktail Special."

To be blunt as a film, CAPTURED FOR SEX 2 is basically 'unreviewable' since whatever cinematic attributes it may possess are so slim as to render the whole movie filmically worthless. Story and character are negligible, the visual style (while technically competent) is unattractive. Although I admit the closing minutes contain a certain favored delirium, we're not exactly dealing with Oshima or Imamura here – even Koji Wakamatsu, a Japanese sex-film director who specializes in similar fare, demonstrates more moments of impressive orgasmic transcendence than anything on display here. The sole attraction to the film – if one can call it that – comes from the standard freak-show/shock-value factor which may encourage someone to submit themselves to this nauseating endurance test. Admittedly, I assume the film was created with the intention of sexual arousal in mind, but I honestly can't judge the movie on that level; I'm certainly not trying to adopt a holier-than-thou moral stance on the material, I just can't relate to it in that context, so far is it removed from my own sensibilities (I'll even allow that I could've 'dealt with' the S&M sequences on a purely visual level, if the film's overall view of women hadn't been so unbearably deplorable). However, I can't deny that there is a definite morbid fascination brought on by viewing the film, although I suspect that – as is the case with other films of its type – the compulsion is momentary and superficial. As a cultural study of specific sexual attitudes though, CAPTURED FOR SEX 2 is undeniably compelling viewing; this is perhaps the only area in which I could legitimately recommend the film. I admit I've never seen anything else quite like Jun's movie, and one could certainly interpret that as a positive statement in and of itself, I suppose I can also say I don't hope to see anything like it again – the long wide-angle takes of each sequence and the painfully prolonged realism leave no doubt that these acts of sadism are actually being performed on these 'actresses,' and the grisly truth of this is perhaps more than I care to watch.



## GODZILLA VS MECHAGODZILLA

### Review and Observations by August Ragone

"The Age of Mankind is over..." laments Kazuma Aoki (Masahiro Takashima) at the fiery conclusion of *GODZILLA VS. MECHAGODZILLA*, Toho's fifth and latest entry in its new monster series, which began in 1984 with *GODZILLA* (dir. Koji Hashimoto)

Director Takao Okawara hones his experience from his previous genre entry, *GODZILLA VS. MOTHRA* (1982), into a film of power, grace and pathos—arguably the best instalment in the current *Godzilla* continuity. Period

*MECHAGODZILLA* is fast-paced, exciting, suspenseful, living up to its tag-line "A Non-Stop Battle Movie." The film begins with a brisk montage concerning the formation of the United Nations *Godzilla* Countermeasure Center in

Japan, the gathering of technology from the cybernetic head of *MechaKing Ghidorah* from the bottom of the sea (a link from 1991's *GODZILLA VS. KING GHIDORAH*, dir. Kazuki Omeri), the scrapping of the "Garuda" Anti-*Godzilla* Fighter project, and the realization of *MechaGodzilla*—a magnificent achievement for Toho, and one of their most expensive monster creations.

Soon thereafter, Aoki is transferred from his pet *Garuda* project to training as a member of *G-Force* (an elite military unit whose only purpose is to defeat *Godzilla*'s *MechaGodzilla* crew, and we are whisked away to Adonoo Island in the Bering Sea, where scientists from the Life Sciences Institute of Japan have arrived after petroleum company workers uncover a vast

deposit of pteranodon fossils... and a pair of dinosaur eggs (one of which is broken and empty), covered in a strange moss. That night, the team are attacked by Rodan (a giant form of pteranodon)-who hatched from the other egg, after absorbing the nuclear pollution from a nuclear submarine disaster several years earlier (another link with 1981's KING GHIDORAH).

Rodan zeros-in for the kill, when Godzilla erupts from the sea and comes ashore for a spectacular duel with the flying monster (featuring some amazing special effects), allowing the humans to escape with the intact egg by helicopter.

Back in Japan, psychic girl Miki Saegusa (played by Megumi Odaka, a series regular since 1989's GODZILLA VS. BIOLLANTE; dir Kazuki Omaru), senses that a sample of the 'moss' is a telepathic conductor, and in the analysis of the substance, discovering a "song" which accidentally triggers the hatching of the remaining egg. It is not another Rodan, but a baby Godzilla-saurus-looking more friendly than ferocious-and it bonds with the first person it sees: Azusa Goto (Ryoko Sato) of the Life Sciences Institute. Miki feels a disturbance...

Godzilla comes ashore and rumples through Japan in search of the Baby; but, G-Force is alerted and MechaGodzilla is deployed. In the ensuing battle, the mechanical doppleganger almost defeats the King of Monsters in a tense and highly dramatic battle, but the automaton experiences a energy surge, giving Godzilla enough time to rise and pummel it to the earth. G-Force then throws everything it has at the monster, but he is unopposed in marching through the ancient city of Kyoto-straight for the Life Sciences Institute building. Aoki, Saegusa, Goto and the other scientists take refuge with the Baby in a sub-sub basement, and hold out until Godzilla, becoming frustrated, leaves-destroying the city of Osaka before disappearing once again into the sea (a strangely moving scene, highlighted by Maestro Akira Yukubayashi's score).

The UNGCC Weapons Division develops the 'G-Crusher Plan' to defeat Godzilla, by studying Baby and discovering that the beast has a second, or sub-brain, located at the base of its spine. They aim to use Baby as bait to lure Godzilla to a remote island, where the newly refitted MechaGodzilla will use its harpoon-like 'Shock Anchors' to penetrate the leviathan's hide and detonate this sub-brain, rendering Godzilla a sitting duck. Saegusa, Aoki and Goto object, but



their words fall on deaf ears. Godzilla must die... at all costs. And the UNGCC changes Saegusa's orders, and transfers her aboard MechaGodzilla, so they can psychically lock-on to the sub-brain-it is she who must 'pull the trigger'.

Meanwhile, having absorbed Godzilla's radioactive rays, Rodan is awoken by a song performed by a group of psychic children, sung for the Baby. The revived monster, now spewing deadly rays, cuts a destructive swath through the Japanese islands, snatching the helicopter container with Goto and Baby aboard, who were being readied for the G-Crusher plan. The flying monster makes off towards Tokyo with the Gerudo (piloted by Aoki) and MechaGodzilla in hot pursuit.

It seems as though the strange moss found attached to the eggs on Adlonos acted as a form of communication between the embryonic Baby and Rodan-essentially "growing up" together-linked like twin brothers, and Rodan thinks he's rescuing his other.

During the following confrontation, the Gerudo is downed by Rodan - who in turn is defeated by MechaGodzilla's Plasma Grenade cannon - but, just as rescue workers begin to free Goto and Baby, Godzilla appears-seriously bad timing. MechaGodzilla's weapon systems is overheating. After a furious exchange of death rays, MechaGodzilla is rendered immobile by a system shut-down, allowing Godzilla to pound and flatten



the robot-monster. Finally, Aoki makes good his repairs on the Garuda and enters the fray once again... starting the levathan and letting MechaGodzilla make its escape in order to dock with the Garuda, in a plan devised by Aoki, creating the "Super MechaGodzilla"!

The steel giant unleashes its entire combined weaponry, softening Godzilla up for the coup de grace, the G-Crusher. Torn and unsure, Saegusa sets off the weapon, destroying Godzilla's sub-brain... Fallen, the King of Monsters is then soundly killed by a relentless assault from MechaGodzilla. Meanwhile, responding to the cries of Baby, Rodan makes one last effort to come to its aid, and is downed by MechaGodzilla, dying upon Godzilla's corpse.

To the amazement of the MG Crew, a strange light begins emanating from Rodan, enveloping the levathan in a weird glow...

Without spoiling the ending for those who have not yet seen the film, it is a thrilling climax and one of the most satisfying Godzilla movies in years-with some of the best special effects to come out of Toho since GUNHEAD (1988; dir. Masato Harada), under the direction of Koichi Kawakita.

MECHAGODZILLA's special effects excel most especially in regards to the combining of live and effects footage (featuring the heaviest amount of these techniques Toho has attempted in quite a while); Godzilla's attack on the petrol-chemical refinery upon landing in Japan, is downright startling, not only the effects, but the feel of the whole scene, is tremendous.

Without going into extraneous detail, the monsters have, for the most part, never looked better-Godzilla and Rodan are more articulated than ever before-and Baby Godzilla leaves the memories of the mutant-like Minya behind, for a Disneyesque version (but not too hard for adults to swallow), which is amazingly well operated. Alas, as much as the new Rodan is cool, I prefer the slick design of the original beast, as seen in RODAN THE FLYING MONSTER (1956; dir. Ishiro Honda), who was a mean-looking devil: cool evil.

All other technical aspects of the film are top-notch-from the atmospheric photography of Yoshinori Sekiguchi, to the you-are-there FX of Kenichi Eguchi. The soundtrack for GvMG was the first-ever in Japan to be recorded digitally in analog-and the results are fabulous, with some of the best sound for a Godzilla film-absolutely augmenting the rousing musical score composed by Maestro Akira Ifukube.

And what a score it is! Besides the beautifully re-scored Godzilla and Rodan themes (the latter adapted from 1965's GHIDRAH THE 3-HEADED MONSTER), the new pieces are ones that are hard to get out of your head once you leave the film behind-typical of the best of Ifukube's works. The three most memorable themes in the film are the pounding MechaGodzilla theme, the march for G-Force and the beautifully moving choral theme, Baby's signature. Ifukube has outdone himself once again.

The acting in MECHAGODZILLA is hard to fault, director Okawara seems to have a better handle on his thespians than Omori had in his Godzilla outings; Takeshima (who also starred in GUNHEAD and ZIPANG, 1990; dir. Kaizo Hayashi) is very likeable as Aoki, Sand's Gojo is quite charming, and Otake is as intense as ever in the role of the G-Psychic, Miki. The other actors work well, and surprisingly, so do the foreigners: Sherry Sweeny is a natural as MG Co-pilot Lt. Catherine Burger (I'd have liked her to have had more scenes), and Leo Mengetti as Professor Ashimov (I) is no stranger to the genre, having played the nasty main scientist on Toei's 1988 teleseries MOBILE COP JIBAN. Godzilla series veterans, Kenji Sahara (the star of THE MYSTERIANS and RODAN) and Masahiro Takeshima's father, Tadeo (star of KING KONG VS. GODZILLA and ATRAGON), turn in credible and welcome cameos-providing more continuity to the Godzilla mythos.

As for myself, the best facet of the film's human drama was the concept and interplay/tension between the members of G-Force-but due to running time constraints (cutting 115 mins. down to 105), much of screenwriter Wataru Mimura's characterizations ended up on the cutting room floor. Keep your fingers crossed, Toho Video may release a "Director's Cut" on this one. Regardless, see it. ATCers, you are sure to be blown away.

Godzilla Lives! (What didja think?)



# TSUI HARK'S WORLD OF FANTASY

## A COMMENTARY ON TSUI'S FILMS WITH EMPHASIS ON TWO OF HIS LATEST

by Dr. Craig D. Reid

*There is no place in the world, including Hollywood that can boast a more vital, exciting and popular cinema than Hong Kong. Indeed a tidal wave of Hong Kong talent is crashing against the American shores slowly devouring Hollywood's monopolized grasp on the world's movie pulse. Spearheading this Asian invasion is Tsui Hark, the acknowledged leader of the new wave, foreign trained HK filmmakers. He consistently produces quality products at break neck speed, at a fraction of the cost of most top Hollywood action filmmakers, yet he leaves them by the wayside.*

Traditionally, the depths of artistic understanding of foreign cinema were only open to specialists familiar with the language. However, Tsui churns out films that smoothly butters our bread, eliciting unique flavors that have been widely forgotten. Titrating our taste buds to cry, 'more, more, more.' He fattens us with wild and sometimes outrageous visuals. His lurid ghost thrillers, bloody relicking gangster epics, and fast paced supernatural-powered hero films have transcended him into the American limelight.

At the forefront of Tsui's genius are his "costume action dramas," a unique genre of film that became popular in the West upon the arrival of his *A Chinese Ghost Story*. When you first see his "Ghost Story" films you'll be agape at its fluidity, frenetic action, and lack of ostentatious displays of marvel. Unlike American similarly conceived film products that endlessly fuss over special effects, where the action moans under heavy story-boarded sermons of repetition. Tsui's ghost flicks are swirling affairs, breezing through the muddled muck of predictability yet deftly juggling the conventions of martial arts and slapstick tomfoolery. He churns out the most delicious and astounding fantasy/horror sequences in world cinema, where anything goes.

I recently returned from Hong Kong from a 2 month "tour of tutelage" on fight directing learning with Tsui, on the set of *Once Upon A Time In China V*, with Jackie Chan on the set of *Drunken Master II* and Ching Siu Tung. I not only had the unabashed pleasure to be with them, but got to see a lot of movies. Apart from getting private screenings from Tsui's last 6 films, including his sleeper, *Iron Monkey* and the curious *Maglo Crane*, I was invited to the world premiere of his latest film *Green Snake at Kowloon's Miramar Theatre*.

To fully appreciate Tsui's unique fantasy-martial art genre of film, it is essential to understand how fight films evolved in the Hong Kong movie industry, starting with the "Wu Xia Pian" (Hero films) created in the 1920's. In these films, the heroes could fly, fight with supernatural

martial art skills, control weapons with their minds and shoot "death rays" out of their hands. It wasn't until the late 1960's when film became known as *Gung-fu Pian* (Kung-fu films) that movies' characters and fights assumed a more realistic tone where skill level were more believable. These were popularized by Bruce Lee and Jackie Chan.

In the 1970's Shaw Bros financed the creation of the "Guo Shu Pian" (Neo-hero films). Lu Chia Lung is credited for developing this new genre which eloquently mixed the old style *Wu Xia Pian* with the popular savvy of the *Gung-fu Pian*.

When Jackie Chan moved to Golden Harvest, the demise of the *Gung-fu Pian* started. Chan invented a new genre of film known as the *Wu Da Pian* (fight films using martial arts), in which he combined athleticism, martial arts and dangerous stunts.

In the West, HK is synonymous with "Kung-fu" a term that is almost used derogatorily. This prostitution, enhanced by the poorly dubbed, "takes two weeks to film" kung-fu movies seen on late night American television, has single handedly tarnished the reputation of an industry. Tsui Hark was the cure.

So in 1983, Tsui waved his magic scalpel and gave Hong Kong cinema a face lift and created *Zu Warrior from Magic Mountain*, the first "costume action drama" genre of film which gracefully entertained Chinese myth, brilliantly conceived special effects and comic book action. His novel approach to the *Wu Xia Pian* utilized incredible fight sequences, enhanced by elaborate aerial acrobatics, sharp editing, and a flurry of outrageous camera angles that earned him the label, "Hitchcock/Spielberg of Asia."

"I am very honored to be placed in the same breath as film greats such as Alfred Hitchcock and Steven Spielberg, I appreciate the praise but I'm embarrassed."

Hong Kong films can grow tedious very quickly with even the best sporting that assembly line frugality, where one is quickly deprived from the magical surges of

emotion and can be lulled into the quagmire of shallow and apolitical allegory. But Tsui's rambunctious epics have dared to introduce the didactic and morally instructive themes into an arena of complacency.

His mesmerizing films have raised the sword-and-sorcery genre from its hollows of selfish individualism. It's wild and fascinating to witness. Often being accused of jumpy visuals and strange editing procedures, very little is really known in America about what goes on behind the scenes in Hong Kong. Tsui's gives an example from his experiences with *Zu*.

"Nine months after filming *Zu*, during postproduction, I realized that about 50 shots were missing. Apparently a line producer, without my knowledge had edited out the scenes from the script. I offered Golden Harvest to let me re-shoot and re-edit the project for free. They declined my offer. *Zu* could have been a much better film, it has fast action, but it wasn't fancy."

Many American action filmmakers worry that everything has already been done, but repeat the same thing anyway hoping that their redundancy is hidden by producing a more pulverizing effect. However Tsui ignored this frivolous fear and moved beyond his classics *Zu* and *Ghost Story* to develop a successful line of supernatural-fantasy martial art stylized costume action dramas. Such hits as *Swordsman* and *Once Upon a Time in China* series, *Iron Monkey*, *The Raid* and *Dragon Inn* have all paved the way for countless imitations. Yet Tsui has never practiced martial arts.

"When I was 13, I started making short 8 mm experimental films about magic. I also created and drew an old style kung-fu comic strip for a local paper. Although I never practiced martial arts, I did enjoy reading *Wu Xia* novels. (Novels depicting heroes using

supernatural fighting skills to battle evil beings). When I make a film I don't want to emulate the American productions so I decided to make "*Wu Xia*" films that the Chinese audience can relate to, so I use traditional tales for the films *Green Snake* and *Magical Crane*."

But Hark's manatey is that his films contain a ring of authentic popular culture sporting the kind of storytelling found in Hollywood's old style pictures. Tsui identifies with his heroes and knows that the audience does. His plots are anchored in his characters, weaving in the guileless pleasure of 'what-tha' stunts, slapstick tomfoolery, wild flying chases, and soaring virtuoso's of swordplay, long sleeved flying beauties and emotion. Emotion is his key.

"Emotion is the most essential element in my films. By taking many shots from different angles, I can bring out the emotions of a scene. The emotion of fight sequence is also important and tempo is produced by sharp editing procedures and by paying attention to camera operations." He fills the screen with brilliant sequences of engaged extravagance but he never loses sight of the story. His latest release *Green Snake*, is based upon an old style Chinese novel. For a while, period pieces were losing popularity in Hong Kong, but the critics raved that this film would reverse this trend.

It's about two giant female snakes, a white one (Joey Wang) and a green one (Maggie Cheung), wanting to become human in order to experience the emotion of love. The white one falls in love with a teacher, sparking a jealous comedic rivalry between the two snakes. When the green one gets sexually aroused, she turns back into a snake, further confusing the poor teacher's led-to-believe hallucinations. Meanwhile, a spirit-fighting monk (Zhao Wen Zhou-Jet Li's namesake in *Fong Sai Yuk Pt 1*)



Tsui Hark (L) with Dr. Craig Reed

travels the world seeking to destroy spiritual anomalies, like snakes and spiders, that are able to use their supernatural powers to transform themselves into human being after several hundred years of intense training. When challenged by seductive human-like female monkeys he almost loses his thoughts of celibacy but breaks into a frenzy of dazzling spins and sword-like postures with his fixed weapon of soul reunification.

As is common for Tsui, many of his films are basically action extensions of Taoism where the spirit battling priest believes that heaven and earth are limitless, and that a man who sincerely identifies himself with the 'path of righteousness' can be every bit as powerful as the most dreaded demon. This is more visually compelling when the actor portraying these worldly priests use nothing but their own body for the action sequences flouting the laws of gravity, human anatomy and common sense. The showy displays of choreography are the whole point of the film, proving the unprovable to even the most skeptical eye.

At the film's beginning, Tsui utilizes some captivating visuals and F/X to produce the effect of the monk and a 'man' running across a meadow. The monk soon discovers that the man is really a spider trying to become human. The 'man' is shown being crunched back down into the size of a spider and shoved into a small box. While still begging for mercy, with a human face, the box is then swept under the cornerstone of a temple. The highlight of his F/X experiments is the appearance of a large gold dragon rising out from the ocean, serpentine across the sky. But Tsui wasn't happy with the dragon.

"We were hurriedly worked on this in order to finish up before the premiere. It was more cartoony than I had wanted. In Hong Kong, long before the film is finished, it is already scheduled to play in the theater. If it is not ready by that time, it will not be seen. All the work will be for nothing. In this film we used some new computerized F/X, but we had too many time constraints. The technical parts of *Green Snake* were disturbing and the results didn't come out the way we wanted."

The special effects for *Green Snake* were completed just hours before its world premiere at Kowloon's Miramar Theater. The supernatural further gives Tsui's choreographical marvels a mythical dimension. "I believe that romance is the most important ingredient necessary to make a film successful."

In another recent supernatural hit, *Magic Crane*, Anita Mui plays a wandering Taoist priestess that rides around on the back of a giant white crane, attempting to save righteous men from killing each other. She falls in love with an injured swordsman Tony Leung, and exhausts most of her magic powers trying to save his life from the effects of bat poison. The evil leader of the Tien Lung Tribe (Manlander newcomer Jie Lin) learns mysterious martial arts from a chained up hermit trapped deep inside a hell hole. He emerges after killing the hermit and goes on a killing rampage.

The movie's most noteworthy scenes showcase the typical wild displays of ballet-like action combined with

the rituals and supernatural powers of age-old martial art heroes and villains. *Magic Crane* is a film that combines entertainment with spiritual substance, where good battles evil and high-vaulting villains disguise themselves as champions of the lowly. Plainly speaking, its mighty impressive looking and a lot of fun to watch. The carnage of slicing and dicing one's opponent are endless in their conception demonstrating more of an operatic style of ballet than action or violence.

Apart from the flying, bodies imploding into their own heads, other sequences are laced with new special effects. In one scene, Mui must rip out the gall bladder from a hidden giant tortoise to make an antidote for her poisoned teacher (Xu Xieo Chung). The most unusual scene pits a flute playing Mui battling the pipe (Chinese guitar) playing Butterfly Lady (played by the puppy-eyed Guan Zher Lin). They stand on a ship harkosely playing their instruments as the ship disintegrates under the power of their shrill sounding musical notes.

In *Magic Crane*, Tsui uses subliminal messages to get his views across. Intermittently throughout the picture, bold red characters poetically flash on the screen expressing his thoughts on loyalty, love, consideration, hope, fear and even revenge.

"These style of films are popular because they are so unrealistic. People live in small places within themselves, and they need a place to escape, lots of stuff in these films offers them the opportunity to escape. They are based on old Chinese novels and I believe there is a resurgence in these kind of stories. Love is the conceptual thing and not really the reality."

The tempo of these films produce an authentic startling rush of excitement where the unabated pleasure and exhilaration of movinggo is reborn close to its purest form of fun. Tsui's flash effects and breathtaking set pieces boggles the brain, but his films never lose touch with what makes the story human. Like when Maggie Cheung in *Green Snake*, forcefully squinting her eyes in an effort to cry after discovering that when one can cry, they have become human. She eventually cries when she doesn't want to.

These lurid stories are filled with flamboyant acting, raucous emotions and vividly displays Hong Kong's most delightful quality in film, its lush extravagance. His films are crammed full of jokes, stunts, tears, battles, subplots, striking visual metaphors, character roles, and many other pleasing stocking filler delights that Tsui dreams up while on the set. And beneath all this blackful entertainment there is even a theme.

A common theme in Tsui Hark's films is love. Whether it's ghosts in *Chinese Ghost Story*, aliens in *Wicked City*, snakes in *Green Snake*, or a robots in *I Love Marie*, Tsui is predisposed towards unearthly creatures attempting to find love with mortal man.

"Love is very difficult to express in Chinese culture, so in my films I like to have a romantic touch where the non-human looks for love. The simple single minded people evoking love survive. It's the intellectual who has the most complicated attitudes that won't survive. This is what I believe."

# HONG KONG GENDER BENDERS

## DRAG AND TRANSVESTITISM IN TSUI HARK'S MOVIES

By Jayne Casenaddi

Not since Ed Wood Jr. donned Angora in order to make the world a better, more accepting place for guys in drag has there been a cinema master who has been as willing to bend genders for the titillation and entertainment of his audience than Tsui Hark, the King of Hong Kong Cinema.

Tsui's body of work as a director and producer has more cross-dressers than you can shake a stick at—heck, more male and females in drag than you can shake a thousand year old tree demon/drag queen/the villain(ess?) of his series of Ghost Story movies—all.

This Master of cinematic wonders has created some of the best examples of big screen transvestitism ever. In wildly entertaining films, which tend to be genre blending sword and sorcery/ghost/martial art combo-packs, Tsui is a relentless showman, with characters careening across the screen in non-stop action, featuring special effects like ghosts who can throw their fingernails 30 feet (literally, nails to DIE for!), martial arts masters that skate across grass and bound from tree to tree, swordsmen who can cleave horses in half with one blow, and acrobats who indulge in breathtaking chases across rooftops, colliding in mid-air with their rivals.

Tsui's movies never lag, but they often drag— as with the thousand year old evil tree demon who is the competing force of his trilogy (so far—anything that works in HK Cinema inspires a myriad of sequels) of Ghost Story movies. This formidable figure is a seriously ugly drag queen with a fondness for shimmering clothes that make them look like an indecent insect at a medieval Chinese Prom.

This "individual" resides within an ancient tree, and can manifest itself as fast emerging growths of tendrils (vegetable drag!) to trap it's victims, and, most excitingly, has a mile long tongue which plunges down his/her's victim's throats, with the audience treated/ subjected to incredible visuals from the tongue's point of view! At several points in these movies, the heroes ride her tongue, either while trapped by her power, or deliberately stabbing their swords into it and holding on as alive flaps all about them!

The Tree Demon always speaks in a windily filtered voice that mixes the masculine and the feminine, a sort of whining, grindy noise when the tree demon is displeased—which of course they are about 98% of their on-screen time! The evil tree demon drag queen is a sort of Satanic "Hello Dolly," a matchmaker, arranging weddings for her cadre of ghostly ladies in waiting to even MORE evil entities than "she."

The plots of both Chinese Ghost Story and Chinese Ghost Story II revolve around young men fighting to free beloved ghost girlfriends from the tree

demon's marriage plans for them, so that they may reincarnate and regain their souls. Since the tree demon has NO chance of reincarnation, they settle for the next best thing—cross-dressing!

In Peking Opera Blues, one of the riffiest films of the century, Tsui gives us Peking Opera matinee idol/drag queen Fa's coerced "romance" with an evil government official as just one of about a thousand intense sub-plots, with Fa and their court of fellow performers serving as a back-drop to the main action, which involves a Revolutionary plot that is being orchestrated by sexy Brigitte Lin, another cross-dresser, and the daughter of a general.

Lin sports stylish, military-cut men's clothes, and her exploits with two other young women—a gold-digger and an aspiring Peking Opera performer/martial arts expert are terrific.

Brigitte Lin's work in Peking Opera Blues may have inspired another great part for her in Swordsman II, which Tsui Hark produced, and partner Ching Siu-Tung directed (they often trade off directing and producing, much like Hollywood's own far wimpler, sexually repressed, and sentimental tag team of similar genres, Steven Spielberg and George Lucas). Here, Brigitte stars it up as a warlord who is prepared to sacrifice himself mightily for the glory of his long oppressed clan.

The warlord comes into the possession of a set of Sacred Scrolls that give him supernatural power— if he is willing to castrate himself! This character, called Invincible Asia, undergoes the blade for the greater glory of his people, and spends the rest of the movie transforming from man to woman, even taking time for a special, clandestine affair with the warlord's erstwhile rival, and the film's main hero, played by Jet Li!

Through the course of the film, Invincible Asia's talents and abilities sharpen and change as she becomes more womanly, until the climactic showdown has her casting a series of vicious (but oh-so-feminine!) embroidery needles at the heroes who come to face her! So effective is Lin's performance however, that when this ruthless, power-corrupted woman dies, the audience can still shed a tear for Invincible Asia, who really was able to give up the family jewels in order to make a place for the clan in history!

Media God Tsui Hark and his team yank both yin and yang to display the craggiest dragon "ladies," the butchiest blade-wielding babes, the most agile, most flexible, widest transsexuals in all of cinema! Glen, or Glenda for that matter, would quake in their size 11 pumps at the full on drag strip of high speed action Tsui's bevy of cross-dressing hero/ines inspire.

# MY SOUL IS SLASHED



## A Modern Vampire Film Reviewed by Charles R.P. Bucklin

In the last issue of ATC, director/writer Saka Kawamura's film *The Last Frankenstein* was reviewed quite favorably by Travis Crawford. Now Kawamura presents a second offering with *My Soul Is Slashed*. In this film, Kawamura teams up with director Shunsuke Kaneko and pays homage to yet another Universal monster movie *Dracula*.

In *Last Frankenstein* Kawamura blended Gothic overtones, social commentary, comic book heroes, black comedy and created a touching film in the process. I was very interested to see what direction Kawamura was going to take with the *Dracula* Legend in *My Soul Is Slashed* (1992).

**The Plot:** A suspicious father who works for a pharmaceutical company is killed by his superiors. Meanwhile, the blood of *Dracula* has been smuggled out of Transylvania. In all the confusion the blood was used for the operation on dad. Obviously, the attempt to save his life fails (but, remember, he's been infected).

A woman scientist (who is a *Dracula* devotee and the one responsible for the blood mix up) tracks down the grieving daughter and informs her that if she is a "virgin", a few drops of her blood on her dad's ashes will revive him. The daughter follows the instructions, and the father returns-- totally unaware that he has been dead for an entire year.

The woman scientist suddenly appears on the scene and, with the daughter, begins a relationship with undead dad. At first the father rebels against his new "state of being" and acts bewildered. However, as the movie progresses, dad's vampire nature begins to take hold and soon it's vengeance time with the villains running for cover.

So what is Kawamura really saying with this film? How does it relate to the vampire mythos? It's important to look at the universe created by Kawamura (*Slashed* and *Frankenstein*) for an appreciation for this film.

To understand Kawamura's vision we must accept one of his major premises: it's not the monsters who are evil, but instead— the creator of monsters, Man. It's the mad scientists, the driven corporate executives, the gun happy mobsters, the negligent fathers and suicidal mothers who set the stage for the tragedies in Kawamura's films. All of these characters suffer from the same flaw. None are able to cope with the emotions of the heart. In both *Frankenstein* and *Slashed* the real monsters are the people so preoccupied with their own ambitions that they are detached from their emotions. They act with the utmost cruelty to those around them. It's interesting to note that all plot nuances (in both films) occur when a character comes in touch with his emotional self.

For example in *Slashed*, there's a poignant moment when the vampirized dad sees a young woman in an aerobics class... she is beautiful... luminescent...and suddenly he realizes... My God, it's my daughter! He's really "seeing" his daughter for the first time. This moment is well captured through the turn of emotions on actor Ken Ogata's face. As the camera moves in, Ogata without saying a word goes from enchantment, to shock, to disbelief, to finally—sad resolution. At that moment, the undead father accepts his situation and is able to leave his old life behind.

In *Frankenstein*, the shit-hits-the-fan when Professor Aleo (always in control) finally loses it and attacks his creation with an axe, only to be murdered in the process. With Aleo's death, the stage is set. And the strange insular family falls apart tragically.

The created monsters in both films (i.e., *Frankenstein* and *Dracula*) behave in ways that are traditionally monstrous but at the same time, they seem to be fulfill some higher function. In other words, they are not merely acting like id

Beasts on a rampage (ala *Forbidden Planet*), instead they are almost "santa" by comparison to those around them.

Case in point, in *Slashed* Kawamura presents us with an ineffectual father who transforms into a more emotional being by becoming a vampire. Thus, dad migrates from a Chump to a Byronic hero faster than you can say Jack Daniels. Here is a new twist to the genre— becoming a monster is viewed as a positive experience.

Another aspect of Kawamura's universe is revealed in the role of "daughter" in both *Slashed* and *Frankenstein*. Daughters are the metaphysical heart of both films. Once the heart is accepted and embraced, chaos is balanced. All is well again. In *Slashed* and *Frankenstein* the young daughters are never abused, mistreated, nor threatened— rather, they are neglected. It is this neglect that sets the stage for the ensuing drama.

Visually, *Slashed* is like a phaser set on stun. The viewer is swept into a dark fairy tale reminiscent of Cocteau's *Beauty And The Beast*, complete with swirling mists and illuminated figures. In fact, the use of light in the opening of *Slashed* would make any *Beats* fan proud (*Blood and Black Lace* comes to mind immediately). After the dream-like beginning, director Shunsuke Kaneko kicks things off with an ode to an Indiana Jones adventure as the servant Oono arrives carrying a satchel containing "the blood of Dracula." But, that image is quickly replaced. We find ourselves suddenly emersed in the world of contemporary Japan with all of its idiosyncrasies.

Kudos should be given to Kaneko's camera work. Superb, if not astounding. Both camera style and direction are confidently handled with verve and style. The viewer travels effortlessly through the film. For those who like action packed kineticism— roller coaster mayhem— then this is the film for you. My only criticism (and strictly my personal taste), I would've preferred more "horor" in this movie. Fine performances are given by Ken Ogata, Narumi Yaseda, and Hikari Ishida. Special stand-out is Oono, the servant (you may remember him as Grandpa in *Female Neo Ninjae*). Lastly, the music is incredible. It's reminiscent of the best Hammer Film scores. Plus the title theme, sung by European diva Mylene Farmer, adds a contemporary luster to the film.

# DEATH WEARS A TOPKNOT

## A Primer to the *Son of the Black Mass* Films

By Bob Sargent

(Part One)

If you've never seen any of the films in the elusive *Son of the Black Mass* series, I envy you because you're in for a real cinematic treat! There were twelve features made by Dai-ichi Studios with Raizo Ichikawa as the red-haired Kyoshiro Nemuri, a Eurasian swordsman (product of an illicit union between a Portuguese missionary and a Japanese lady-in-waiting) living in feudal Japan. An arrogant fighter, Kyoshiro uses his extreme hatred of Christians as an excuse to propel himself into a bewildering variety of dangerously overheated situations. At times displaying an almost split-personality, he kills both converts and anti-Christian shogunate officials with equal relish. The only thing that seems to see him through his troubles is his skill with the legendary 'Full Moon Cut' (a fictional [and lethal] sword-fighting style that is as fun to watch on screen as it is distinctive).

The series, which spanned nearly a decade, introduced some wildly innovative camera work and eye-popping action, generously laced with tease nudity and liberal explosions of gore. Kyoshiro's wild world was populated with insane aristocrats, murderous rogues, skulking ninjas, corrupt politicians, scheming courtesans, lascivious teahouse waitresses, fanatical clergymen and an incestuous uppercrust that kept these chambers rife with conflict- and the viewer on the edge of his seat. [Chambara is a popular expression for *ken-geki* (or "sword theatre") which were originally plays with realistic swordfights.]

As an actor, Raizo Ichikawa was on a par with the likes of Toshiro Mifune and Tatsuya Nakadai, two of Japan's finest. Had he been able to live to his potential, perhaps he might even have surpassed them, but sadly he died at age 37 (of colon cancer). His artistry lives on, however, as we have a permanent filmic record of Ichikawa's masterfully understated portrayal of the nightmare-haunted Kyoshiro, a larger-than-life figure unlike any that the cinema has ever seen before (or since).

If watched chronologically, the films follow a logical progression in terms of nudity and violence. The earlier entries are rather dry in

terms of both, but as we approach those produced in the late '60s, the way these elements are handled on the big screen gets much more explicit. Other trends and common threads will be caught by more attentive viewers. The use of poison, for instance, is something that pops up time and again. In *A Ronin Called Nemuri*, a lusty young girl is bitten by a venomous snake while rolling in the sack with Kyoshiro (who unsuccessfully tries to save her by slashing her leg with his sword and sucking out the toxins). An evil woman from *Castle Menagerie* spikes the beverage of one of her bed partners-causing the poor fellow to spew blood before expiring-and the sadistic siblings of *The Human Tarantula* experiment with some ghastly stuff on the terrified peasantry imprisoned in their dungeons.

But let's get back to Kyoshiro's main claim to fame, the aforementioned *Full Moon Cut*. Positioning his katana (sword) at 7 o'clock, he slowly moves the blade in a counterclockwise direction. The opponents suckered in by this trick never survive the encounter, and are usually dropped in their tracks before the weapon even completes the circle. A striking visual effect came out of a desire to signal the use of Nemuri's unusual brand of swordplay. Step-printing (a technique whereby multiple blades are seen on the screen at the same time) was used to great effect, and became *de rigueur* for the rest of the series after its first appearance (in *Kyoshiro Nemuri at Bay*).

Scores of fighters try various ways of foiling it, all to no avail (everything from seasoned veterans who throw a second weapon into the circular path of Nemuri's sword, to crafty rivals who go as far as actually learning and imitating the same technique). Whenever we see our anti-hero holding his blade in that certain way (and giving it his trademark flip to set things in motion), we know it's all she wrote for some poor bastard (women aren't immune either as Kyoshiro-being the equal-opportunity killer that he is-has seen to it that many an evil lady samurai has tasted his steel as well).

What follows (in this ATC and again in the next issue) is just an overview. Given the difficulty of



the Japanese language and the unavailability of English language materials pertaining to these films, the definitive work on the subject will have to wait for another day. Hopefully, this will serve as a good stepping-stone to ASIAN TRASH CINEMA readers who are unfamiliar with, but game to take a crack at this amazing body of work.

#### #1 NEMURI KYOSHIRO SAPPPOCHO

Kyoshiro Nemuri: Copybook of Death 1963/d. Tokuzo Tanaka/81 min. A striking pre-credit sequence sets the tone for the whole series. Kyoshiro stands erect amid a hail of flaming shuriken (throwing stars), dispatches the gang of ninjas that dared attack him, and then walks off into the inky blackness of the night (and the film titles pop up to cover his trail).

This first installment provides an origin, of sorts. Nemuri gets mixed-up with some ruthless men seeking to possess a jade statue and the ensuing clash results in the shooting(!) death of the one true love of his life. With little on-screen bloodletting, and only the occasional un-draped feminine shoulder, this entry

barely foreshadowed what the series was to become (i.e. it offered precious little in the way of cheap thrills). What it did exhibit were the first faint glimmers of the visual signatures and idiosyncrasies that developed down the road, and which helped make the series so unique.

For example, in one scene, our hero cuts layers after layer of clothing off a fleeing woman with his sword until she is left (presumably, as we only see her shredded garb flying in all directions) with nothing but her footwear - an activity that was to later become a Kyoshiro hallmark. Beautifully stylized imagery is a given, and the liberal use of color came early, especially in the case of one camelot's glowing green den.

This film also greatly benefited from the participation of Kengo Iwano Joh (aka Tomasaburo Wakayama, of the Baby Cart series) contributing some fancy footwork, and a performance by Nakamura Utaemon (the wife of Shintaro Katsu, Wakayama's real-life brother).

Tanaka worked on the provocatively titled *Secrets of a Woman's Temple* (*Yoku Onnadera*, 1960), numerous horror movies, and several entries in an early yakuza series with Shintaro Katsu, including *A Bad Reputation* (*Okumyo*, 1961).



Raizo Ichikawa as Kyoshiro Nemuri

## #2 NEMURI KYOSHIRO SHOBU

*Showdown aka Adventures of Kyoshiro Nemuri* 1964/d  
d: Keiji Matsu/82 min. After witnessing a young woman  
being publicly denuded, our black-kimonoed drifter  
befriends an old man charged with the task of  
overseeing the shogun's frivolous daughter Taka-hime.  
A rousing fight involving an opponent who throws  
sharpened scissor-like spikes takes place after Nemuri  
is drugged and taken captive for the libidinous  
Taka-hime's pleasure. For some vague reason, a group  
of hit men are out to get the old man and, consequently,  
Kyoshiro. One of them tries to ambush our hero in a  
public bath house, but ends up getting a surprise of his  
own (when a friend from the ladies' side slips Kyoshiro  
his sword underwater).

With Kato Goh from Hideo Gosha's *Sword of the  
Beast* (*Kodomo no Ken*, 1955). Matsu, who had  
been already toiling in the Japanese film industry since  
1941 (when he started at Nikkatsu Studios), directed  
several of the famous Baby Cart movies which, of  
course, made a superstar out of the late Tomsaburo  
Wakayama. Displaying a flair for action films (check out  
the *Henzo the Blade* series and you'll see what I mean),  
a predilection for period pieces (all of his films are  
*jida-geki*), developing his own distinctive visual  
signatures, and gaining a reputation as a successful  
rethinker, Matsu's career as a filmmaker was assured.  
Incidentally, the first 70mm film in Japan was Matsu's  
*Buddha* (1961) for Daiei.

## #3 NEMURI KYOSHIRO ENGETSU GIRI

*Full Circle: Killing aka Exploits of Kyoshiro Nemuri*,  
*Swordsmen* 1964/d. Kimiyoshi Yasuda/85 min. Much  
more explicit than the two films that preceded it (in terms  
of sex and violence), this entry starts off promisingly with  
an eerie decapitation on a shadowy street corner. The  
red stuff really flows, whether it's seeping from  
underneath corpses, or spouting from severed arms.  
Kyoshiro encounters a young nobleman with mild  
psychotic tendencies and his overbearing mother. For  
some reason, the pair are persecuting an ape-like  
peasant fellow in a nearby shanty town. When a girl  
threatens Kyoshiro with a knife (for invading her  
bedroom), he cuts her robes off with a few well-placed  
sword thrusts and treats us to the first (albeit  
darkness-obscured) semi-nude scene of the series.  
Throwing the young thing down on the floor, Kyoshiro  
leaves her with her bald demere sticking up  
embarrassingly in the air.

There is also some nicely done p.o.v. camera work  
with a running attack up a flight of stairs. Kyoshiro  
sweeps through a band of thugs like wind through a  
wheat field. He also directs a barrage of flying razors  
using only his sword (expect this kind of outrageous  
action in nearly all the films to follow this one) and the  
picture culminates in an exciting battle atop a ferocious  
causeway. And finally-not for the last time-the wiles of a  
woman are used to distract Nemuri while an opponent  
tries to kill him. In this case plotting to run him through  
(unsuccessfully) from beneath the floor. Yasuda was the

director who brought us ghost stories like *100 Monsters*  
(*Yoku Hyaku Monogatari*, 1958).

## #4 NEMURI KYOSHIRO JOYOKEN

*Seductive Sword aka Kyoshiro Nemuri at Bay* 1964/d  
Kazuo Ikehiro/81 min. Sporting one of the most chilling  
opening sequences, this is easily one of the best  
pictures of the series. A demented princess laughs  
demoniacally as she slaughters her opium-addicted  
handmaidens. Their nude bodies are discovered in the  
river by some fishermen (Nemuri among them), setting  
the stage for this struggle with Kiku-hime, another  
daughter of the shogun whose drug habits make her  
prone to such acts of horrendous violence.

Besides the introduction of the sword stop-printing  
trick, *Kyoshiro Nemuri at Bay* contains another series  
landmark. For the first time, Kyoshiro's recurrent  
nightmares are translated to the screen, detailing the  
unlikely circumstances of his birth. The scene is a  
satanic ritual. A black-robed, white-haired gajin  
(foreigner) pours sacrificial blood over-and then  
defiles-the body of a woman as she lay naked on an  
altar. After the child is born, she commits suicide. There  
are also some bizarre sequences where it is difficult to  
tell what is supposed to be reality, and what is a dream.  
One depicts the same rummy-eyed (and much older)  
priest who helped conceive Kyoshiro, fathering another  
child (with the reluctant assistance of a naked Japanese  
woman locked in a prison cell with him). Kyoshiro's  
subsequent horseback-mounted behaving of his dear  
old dad, rescue of a young woman (as she is about to  
be assaulted by a gang of tramps [with Kiku-hime  
enjoying the spectacle from her carriage]), and saving of  
her crucified husband (a popular punishment in this  
series) keep things lively.

The fight choreography is imaginative, with cameras  
being placed everywhere so as not to miss a single  
detail (it must have taken days just to complete one of  
these sequences). Immediately following a fertility ritual,  
the attending priestess decides to sample a little  
truth-and experience of her own with Kyoshiro. In  
mid-embrace, she gives a prearranged signal to a ninja  
swearing in the rafters, but our black-garbed death-dealer  
pulls off an amazing double sword draw, running the  
two villains through simultaneously! (The two sword trick  
comes in handy again when he faces an enemy with a  
ball and chain.) At one point, Kyoshiro is even drugged  
again (by yet another conniving woman), but still  
manages to blind a male attacker who bursts onto the  
scene (and then fall into bed afterwards with the same  
woman who just slipped him a smoke). Kiku-hime  
survives (but not before Kyoshiro cuts off a mask she  
always wears, revealing an acid-scorched face). A subplot  
involves Sakura Krishitan (hidden Christians) and a  
woman who may be his sister (fathered by the same  
priest). When the woman reveals herself to be a  
shogunate spy, Kyoshiro offs her in the hold of an  
abandoned ship (chivalry not being a virtue which he  
prides himself on).

(End of Part One)

# DON'T BE AFRAID SUBSCRIBE!



## Good Trash Knows No Boundaries....

Subscribe to  
**European Trash Cinema**  
or **Asian Trash Cinema!**

SPECIAL OFFER:

Subscribe to both 'zines and **SAVE!**

**YES!** I want to get it in the mail!  
Begin my subscription immediately:

- ☐ One Year (4 issues) of  
**European Trash Cinema** for \$20
- ☐ One Year (4 issues) of  
**Asian Trash Cinema** for \$20
- ☐ One Year (8 issues) of both  
**ETC and ATC** for \$35 (save \$5!)

start subscription with # \_\_\_\_\_

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Send cash, check or money order (payable to Craig Ledbetter). US currency only.

To: **Craig Ledbetter / PO Box 5367 / Kingwood, TX 77325**

Notice: All foreign subscriptions (except Canada) are double the above stated rates.

Yumi Iori

